

THE
INVESTIGATORS
in

THE MYSTERY OF THE
BURNING CRYSTAL

PART III: THE SHOWDOWN WITH RASHURA



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After The Three Investigators gain a better insight into what they are supposed to look for, the trail leads them to more danger when they are trapped again, this time under water. They then realize that there are a lot more to the mystery than expected. If they are to uncover secrets from some forty years ago, they have to piece together bits and pieces of information that confuse them more than help. Eventually, Jupiter, Pete and Bob narrow their trail to a showdown with the demon himself.

The Three Investigators
in
The Mystery of the Burning Crystal
Part III: The Showdown with Rashura

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*(The Three ???: Ghost Bay)
(Part 3: The Burning Crystal)*

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1. A Hidden Key

It became a very quiet return trip. After the *Fiesta* dropped The Three Investigators back in port, they were picked up by the military police and questioned for an hour. They were then handed over to Sergeant Madhu, who took them back to Rocky Beach. He also said very little. Only when he stopped at the gate of the salvage yard did he turn to them. "Forget the whole thing. Believe me, it's for the best. This case is not for kids."

"We are not kids," Jupiter said stubbornly.

"Yes, all right. Young adults then, I don't want to argue. You were very efficient, but that's over now. You'd better go back to chasing cats and such."

Jupiter ignored that remark. "What will you do now?"

"Me? I have a few things to explain to my supervisor, but beyond that I can't say anything at the moment... but that does not concern you anymore. So, I wish you all the best. Goodbye!"

They got out and threw the doors shut. Sergeant Madhu accelerated and the car rolled away.

When the car had turned around the corner, Jupiter said: "Come on, fellas!"

"Where to?" Bob asked.

"To Headquarters, of course. We have a lot to talk about."

"You mean our first major failure?" Pete asked bitterly. "The failure of the century? The total catastrophe?"

"If you insist, Pete, but mainly, we should discuss how to proceed from here."

"I can't hear you, Jupe," cried Bob. "The only thing left to do with this case is to archive it! I'll start a new folder for abandoned cases, and this will be the first one. That's all to it!"

"But I see it quite differently," said Jupiter.

"You can see it anyway as you like," Bob said. "Remember when the *Fiesta* captain called the Navy and he was given an instant reply that there were no one aboard the *Leviathan*? Did he really check? Also, they did not say that they had detained someone on board or trying to get on the ship. At least that would have told us that the people are safe. As I see it, there is a good chance that they missed them as the ship is so huge. And it doesn't make things any easier that three of them were criminals and the fourth lured them into a trap. Besides, we hardly slept at all last night and I would like to crawl into my bed now and never hear or say anything about this case again!"

"Me too," Pete said. "I'm leaving."

"Fine," Jupiter conceded, "so let's meet tomorrow morning and discuss what we have overlooked. See you then!"

"What?" Pete began. "But—"

Jupiter had already turned around and marched to his house. Pete and Bob looked at each other.

"Say," said Pete, "didn't we just say that we didn't want to talk about this case anymore?"

"I thought so too, but are you really surprised that we are not getting our way?" Bob replied.

“No,” Pete said, and after a long pause: “Did we actually miss anything? And even if we did—would that still be of any use now?”

“I don’t know.” Bob made a grimace. “You know him. He knows that we’d get curious and would eventually come here tomorrow to find out.”

“I think we ought to give him a big surprise and not come tomorrow.”

“Right.”

They walked on in silence and shortly afterwards reached the corner where they parted.

“Well...” said Pete resignedly. “See you tomorrow.”

The next morning, on a Sunday, Pete entered Headquarters and bounced back immediately. “Jupe! Tell me, what exactly are windows for?”

“Huh?” Jupiter looked up from the computer. “What? Oh, I see. The windows are of no use here anyway, because there’s no wind coming through, and besides, I think that a concentrated atmosphere is conducive for concentrated thought work.”

“Concentrated atmosphere is good? The air in here is disgustingly stale!” Pete tore open the two windows and switched on the fan, which the First Investigator had recently assembled from three plastic paddles and a small motor. Then he moved three empty pizza boxes from an armchair to the floor and sat down. “Did you at least order one for us?”

“Order one what?”

“Pizza.”

“No, why? Don’t they feed you at home?” Jupe quipped.

“No, neither do you, by the looks of it.”

“What makes you think so?” Jupe asked. “On the contrary, Aunt Mathilda baked pancakes with maple syrup this morning. They were almost as good as her cherry pie.”

“And I suppose there’s nothing of that left for us either.”

Jupiter shook his head disapprovingly. “Pete, you shouldn’t always think about food.”

Pete snorted. “I will try! Has at least something come out of your concentrated thought work?”

“Of course. But I’m still waiting for Bob, so I don’t have to repeat my findings.”

“I’m here.” Bob flipped up the trap door in the floor and climbed out from Tunnel Two. “And just for the record, I’m having trouble with my parents. My mother doesn’t think I should stay away overnight without telling them. So I claimed that Worthington’s car had a flat tyre, and we had to stay in a motel on the way back, and it was late so I did not call... Jupe, are you listening to me?”

“Of course,” said Jupiter, without taking his eyes off the screen. “You’re in trouble with your parents and you told them a fib. Very reprehensible.”

Bob threw himself into his armchair. “Sure, I could have told her that we were first locked in a cell and then watched a gigantic aircraft carrier with several people on board being sunk. I’m sure she would have liked that excuse better.”

“They weren’t on board,” said Jupiter, pulled a piece of paper and a pencil towards him and wrote something down.

Pete and Bob stared at him.

“They were not on board?” Pete repeated. “How do you know?”

“We have drawn the wrong conclusions from what we have seen,” Jupiter interrupted him, “mainly because we ignored human nature.” He finally looked up at his two friends.

“And I’m sure you’d like to explain that to us now,” Bob demanded.

“Right, Bob.” Jupiter leaned back. “By the way, I would like to point out that I have no doubt that Ishmael really wanted to lure the three criminals into a trap. And maybe it was even so important to him that he was willing to risk his own life for it. But could he really expect that they wouldn’t notice that something was wrong with the *Leviathan*?”

“What do you mean?” Pete interjected. “What was wrong with the ship?”

“Decommissioned ships that are to be sunk are completely stripped beforehand,” Jupiter continued. “The wreck is to become a reef where fish and coral can settle—and to do so, it should not cause an environmental disaster by leaking oil or other toxic substances. Pretty much anything of military reuse value, dangerous or harmful to the environment is removed until only an empty metal shell remains. In addition, the explosive charges on board were probably so gigantic that not even the most treasure-hungry criminals could overlook them.”

Bob frowned. “All right, but they wouldn’t have seen all this until after they have got on board.”

“That’s right,” said Jupiter, “but there was absolutely no way they could have done that by following the ship when she was being towed out to be sunk. The only plausible way to get on board was when the ship was at dock. Since they could not enter the naval base, my guess is that they approached the ship by boat. But have you seen how high the deck was from the waterline? It would not be possible to climb up from a boat without a ladder or rope. By the time they tried something, the authorities would have got to them.”

“But if they were not on the ship,” Pete asked, “then where were they?”

“In the safe custody of the Navy, I suppose,” Jupiter replied. “I believe when the Navy said that there was no one on board, they won’t just say something like that without checking. The *Leviathan* must have been quite well guarded, and as a former member of the Navy, Ishmael must have known that. I believe that he, Smith, Taylor and Angelica were found by a patrol boat the night when they approach it in a yacht or boat. They were taken away. However, for some reason, they chose not to tell us, but I believe that they told Sergeant Madhu... and he didn’t tell us anything because he wanted us out of the way... and because in his opinion, this case is not for kids.”

“From the way you say it, it sounds pretty logical,” said Pete. “Why didn’t we think about it earlier? I went half mad yesterday because we couldn’t save Ishmael and the others—and they weren’t even on board! Couldn’t you have told us that earlier? At least it would have saved me a horrible night!”

“Me too,” Bob said.

“If I were spiteful, I would say it now—I wanted to explain it to you yesterday, but you didn’t want to come in here to Headquarters. But since I’m not spiteful, I won’t say it.”

“I am so glad you are not spiteful,” growled Bob. “All right. What do we do now?”

“At the moment, we may not be able to contact Ishmael, so we should continue to focus on finding the Star of Kerala.”

“But wait,” Pete said. “If the *Leviathan* has been gutted, the stone probably isn’t even on board anymore! I’m sure Ishmael has already taken it out and hidden it somewhere else!”

“I won’t believe that until I know for sure,” Jupiter said. “Why would Ishmael give us all those clues about the *Leviathan* and even disguise himself as a mad prophet if the trail was false? Somewhere on board the aircraft carrier, there must be something else that can help us.”

“Great,” Bob said. “So he was trying to lure us into a death trap with explosives? That just increases my excitement about this case immeasurably.”

Jupiter shook his head. “No, I think he wanted to help us get on board before it got dangerous. Unfortunately, we lost too much time... and then Smith and his gang beat us to

it."

"But would the Navy arrest any of its own people?" Pete wondered. "Even if they have imprisoned Smith and the others, Ishmael should surely be freed. Maybe he went aboard quickly afterwards and got out the stone, or a clue, or whatever it was."

"There are too many maybes," said Jupiter. "I would rather deal with the facts. In fact—" He broke off. Although none of them had moved, the trailer swayed. They sat quiet as a mouse and listened. Again the ancient mobile home trailer swayed slightly back and forth and they heard a piece of metal slip on the roof.

"There's someone on the roof!" whispered Pete. "Is that Jim?"

"No, today is Sunday," whispered Jupiter back. "And a person as huge as Jim would make much more noise and break through."

Bob began: "But if he's on the roof, he might discover our—"

A hatch opened above them crunching and glaring sunlight poured in.

"—Roof hatch," Bob finished his sentence.

Dazzled, The Three Investigators blinked upwards. A head became visible, but they only recognized who it belonged to when he spoke.

"Here you are! I heard you talking, but I couldn't find you anywhere! Man, is this a trailer underneath all this junk?"

"No, a submarine," Bob replied angrily. "Hello, Gerry. What are you doing up there on the roof?"

"To look for you three of course, what else? Can I come in?"

"No," Jupiter said sharply. "Wait for us at the aeroplane! We're coming out."

"All right," Gerry said disappointedly and closed the hatch a little tighter than necessary. Again the trailer swayed as he climbed over the pile of scrap metal.

"Why didn't you want to let him in?" Pete asked.

"Firstly, because this is our secret headquarters," replied Jupiter, "and secondly, because I don't want a stranger listening to us when we talk about a case."

"But maybe he has some information for us!" Bob said.

"He can tell us outside." Jupiter stood up. "But until we are sure who's on which side, we'd better be careful."

They left Headquarters through the Cold Gate and circled the pile of scrap metal under which the trailer was hidden. Between the scrap heap and the back fence stood the old military plane, Gerry with a plastic bag in his hand and Aunt Mathilda, who looked on disapprovingly at The Three Investigators.

"Jupe! Didn't you promise me that you would bring this rusty heap of metal back to its former glory? And instead, you are hanging around who knows where! Do you perhaps think that this thing will derust itself? And when are you gonna find a buyer for it?"

"We're working on it, Aunt Mathilda!" assured Jupiter.

"So?" snorted his aunt. "I'd like to see that. The steel brushes are over there. You can start right away!"

"Steel brushes?" cried Bob in horror. "For a plane of this size?"

"Yeah, you think I'm gonna let you use power tools on a Sunday? No, you could do with some real work!"

"But Aunt Mathilda," Jupiter began, "like you said, it's a Sunday..."

"And tomorrow is Monday and you spend half the day at school. This plane has been occupying space here for two weeks now, and that's enough. If you don't get rid of it by next week, it will go into the scrap press. Anyway, I don't know what your uncle was thinking when he allowed you to bring it here."

Once Jupiter's aunt was in such a mood, any objection was futile. So Pete trotted to the workshop and fished three steel brushes out of the toolbox. But because Aunt Mathilda was as good-hearted as she was energetic, she said: "At least an hour, until noon. Then there'll be something good to eat. I'll bring you the drinks right now. Deal?"

The mood of The Three Investigators suddenly improved. "Okay! Thank you," cried Jupiter.

She went back to the house and Jupiter, Pete and Bob turned to Gerry who had silently followed the conversation.

"Is your aunt always so strict?" he asked Jupiter uneasily.

"You call that strict?" Pete answered instead. "That was nothing. You should see her when she chases him out of bed at five in the morning to put out burning car tyres or chase intruders. Then she is strict. Here, catch!" He threw one of the steel brushes at the surprised boy and Gerry caught it hastily, almost dropping his plastic bag. "You can help us. After all, the plane is your baby."

"What are you doing here anyway?" Jupiter asked while they were each getting themselves a brush.

"I have found something," Gerry replied. He stuck the steel brush under his arm, reached into his bag and took something out. It was a model aeroplane—a tiny replica of the aircraft that towered behind them like a primeval monster. Colours, lettering, everything matched, only the mini-small plastic cockpit was still completely intact and the manufacturer had also dispensed with the rust.

"Cute," said Jupiter. "So?"

"Well," Gerry said, "there was a key hidden in it."

2. A New Plan

Stunned, The Three Investigators stared at him. “A key?” Jupiter asked, “and where is it?”

“That’s the problem. Look...” Gerry turned the model plane around and removed a small flap behind the wheel suspension. Half of the fuselage was filled with a plaster compound, in which the imprint of a key was clearly visible. At the edges of the impression, the plaster had splintered as if it had been worked on with a screwdriver. “Someone had taken the key out.”

“Looks like it,” said Jupiter. “Where did you get this plane?”

“That’s the funny thing,” Gerry said. “I went back to my grandpa’s house... I wanted to see what it looked like when it is empty. Of course, I couldn’t go in but when I went into the garden, I saw that a window at the top of the balcony was broken. So I thought I’d just climb up and see if I could get in. There’s nothing to it. After all, the house is mine, so to speak—at least until it’s sold!”

“Yeah, sure,” said Jupiter. “What happened next?”

“Yes, so I climbed up, and got into the house, then—”

“Wait! I hear your aunt coming, Jupe,” Bob hastily interrupted. “We’d better get some work done!”

In no time at all, the four of them spread out around the plane and began eagerly scratching around the rust. The result was not expected to convince Aunt Mathilda, but strangely enough, she didn’t scold, but just left a tray of mineral water and four glasses in the shade.

At least they didn’t stop working immediately when she left. As they scratched around the fuselage, Gerry went on: “Well, as I said, I got into the house and it was all empty. Then I suddenly remembered that my grandpa had a secret compartment build in his study—where he used to put the more valuable stuff. He showed it to me a couple of times so I know how to open it.

“So I went to the study and opened the compartment. There was nothing in it except for this model plane. There was nothing special about it—it’s a Skyraider. I thought you might be interested since you’re investigators—and I still have to make up for the loss of the receipt.”

Jupiter nodded. “Very good, Gerry.”

“Hey,” Pete exclaimed. “This model plane could be the one that that chap wanted when he stole the box that day!”

“Fisher,” Bob said. “Curtis Fisher, the son of the mayor of Waterside.”

“We didn’t doubt it was him,” said Jupiter while working on a large rust surface on the fuselage. “Maybe we should have checked this Curtis Fisher out. But after we found the envelope in here, I thought we could ignore the theft of the model planes. Obviously I was wrong.”

“What if it’s coincidence?” Pete asked. “Maybe this plaster cast has nothing to do with our plane.”

“Perhaps,” said Jupiter. “It is also part of an investigation where you sometimes follow the wrong tracks. But I wonder whether this small model could perhaps tell us something about the big one.” He ducked under the plane and inspected the fuselage behind the wheel

suspension—the exact position as that in the model. “That’s what I thought. Here’s a flap—well bolted and almost invisible. Let’s take a closer look at this!”

He ran to Uncle Titus’s toolbox and got a couple of screwdrivers. Pete, Bob and Gerry forgot that they were supposed to be working and gathered around him in suspense as he unscrewed the screws on the metal flap. Bob caught the flap as it opened out.

And there it was. There was a lump of plaster stuck to the wall of the small cavity and on it was a key!

“Great work!” cried Pete. “Now we have to figure out what this key is for.”

“Hand me that model plane, Gerry,” Jupiter said and Gerry did so.

Jupiter looked at the plaster in the model plane, then peered back into the fuselage of the big Skyraider and nodded. “All right. You three continue removing the rust, I’ll take care of this.”

With a spatula and infinite caution, he dislodged the plaster from the fuselage. Then he went away with it and the model plane.

“Where are you going?” cried Gerry, but Jupiter did not answer.

“I think he’s going to carefully remove the plaster from the model plane and the key as well,” Pete suspected, and Bob nodded in agreement. “We have all the necessary equipment at our headquarters.”

“Your headquarters? What is that?”

“Our office,” Bob said.

“That trailer there under the pile of junk? That is your office?”

Bob nodded.

“Cool!” cried Gerry enthusiastically. “Can I go have a look?”

“Uh...” Bob didn’t know what to answer. While he didn’t have the impression that Gerry was on the ‘wrong’ side, they couldn’t be sure. In any case, Jupiter had been very clear about this. “We don’t allow outsiders in Headquarters, sorry.”

“But I have helped you,” Gerry said, insulted. “Without me, you would never have found that key!”

“But that’s the way it is,” Pete remarked. “Our headquarters is secret and should remain so.”

“Great,” the boy growled and threw his steel brush on the ground. “Then do your own work in the future!” He went to the tray with the drinks, poured himself a glass of mineral water, gulped it down and stared gloomily at the pile of scrap metal.

Pete and Bob exchanged a look. Bob raised an eyebrow. Pete shrugged. Then they continued to scrub the rust, the fine particles of which settled on their hands, arms, T-shirts and jeans.

It took a short while before Jupiter returned. “Fellas,” he announced, “the cast on the model plane fits that of the key. Anyway, I have carefully taken out the key and kept the two casts in the same condition in case we have a use for it. Anyway, that was good work, Gerry—where is he? Here! You can have your plane back. I’m glad you found it.” He gave Gerry the little model and the boy grumpily stuffed it back in the bag.

“If Curtis Fisher is after the key, surely he knows what it is for,” Bob surmised.

“Of course, but I don’t expect him to tell us,” Jupe said. “So we have to keep it and figure it out ourselves. Technically, the key was found in the big plane, which now belongs to the salvage yard, so the key belongs to us as well.”

“And what about Curtis Fisher if he comes for the key?”

“We don’t need to worry about him. And now we should go for lunch first. Goodbye, Gerry. Thanks again for the help.”

Gerry just stared at him angrily, turned around and walked away.

“Did I miss anything?” Jupiter asked. “What’s wrong with him?”

Bob shrugged his shoulders. “He’s annoyed that we didn’t want to show him Headquarters.”

“Why does that bother him? It’s none of his business,” Jupiter said. “By the way, I’ve got to show you the key, Pete. It looks strange to me. What do you make of it?” He took the key out of his pocket and handed it to Pete.

Pete looked at it carefully. “Hmm...” Pete mumbled. “You’re right. I’ve never seen a key like this before. It has to be custom-made. I believe it is difficult to duplicate, and if I come across a lock for this, I don’t think I could pick it.” He handed the key back to Jupe.

“Good,” Jupe said. “Now I’m starving. Come on, fellas, let’s go for lunch!”

After lunch, Jupiter’s aunt showed mercy and gave The Three Investigators the afternoon off. And so that she wouldn’t have the idea of reconsidering, the boys immediately disappeared into Headquarters—out of sight, out of mind.

“So now we have two sets of strange Moby Dick numbers, a watch belonging to John Fisher, and its box, a custom-made key, a sunken ship, a missing sapphire, a missing Ishmael, a missing not-quite-real princess, a not very helpful riddle and still no idea how they all fit together,” Bob summed up after throwing himself into an armchair. “Right?”

“Not really,” Jupiter contradicted. “They fit together if you look at the road map we have been given.”

“What road map?” Pete asked.

“Mr Shreber’s riddle in his letter to us,” Jupe replied and took a pause for effect. When there was no response from his two friends, he continued: “Let me explain to you...” He opened a drawer and took out the letter. “We now know that we are searching for a horde of treasure which includes the valuable Star of Kerala.

“In the riddle, the first sentence says: ‘I have been given ‘2-7, 6-3’ but there are more.’ So here we have the first set of numbers but he is saying that there are more. The next two sentences say: ‘Find what belonged to John Fisher. He’s got money for it but you can get it back by giving the note.’ This refers to John Fisher’s watch and the pawn shop receipt. From here, we have the second set of numbers ‘1-8, 4-2’ that was found on the watch box.

“The next sentence says: ‘The key to it all can be found in something which once flew’—and that refers to an actual key that we found in Shreber’s Skyraider. Now, at this point, you can see that we are on the right track.

“Finally, the last sentence says: ‘... ask Ishmael about Moby Dick and go the way he sends you—all the way to the resting place.’ We had some problems getting Ishmael to cooperate with us, but eventually, we found out that Moby Dick refers to the *USS Leviathan*,” Jupiter concluded.

“So what is this ‘resting place’ that Shreber mentions,” Pete wanted to know.

“I suppose that the ‘resting place’ of the treasure,” Jupiter replied. “So all these will lead us there, and hopefully also to Ishmael. Having said that, we are not only looking for the treasure, but we also hope to uncover what actually happened back then—so that we can ‘do the right thing’ for Mr Shreber.”

“I hate to say it,” said Bob, “but have you forgotten that the treasure is now at the bottom of the sea? ... In a gigantic ship that was torn apart by several explosions?”

“I haven’t forgotten about that at all.”

“So what do you intend to do?” Pete asked.

“Me? Why me? We are a team, aren’t we? We do everything together.”

“I knew it,” mumbled Pete. “Whenever you say something like that, it means that Bob and I will have some unpleasant job to do while you make yourself comfortable on a deck chair!”

“Coordinating is the name of the game. And the fact is that you both are much fitter than me. But don’t worry, we can really do it together. Someone has to steer the boat while you two dive.”

“Dive?” Pete startled.

“What else? Of course, it is strictly forbidden to dive near such a wreck during the first few days after it has been sunk, because the swirled up sand has to settle first and some wrecked parts can suddenly change their position. But the explosions have driven all the sharks and moray eels out of the area, and on Wednesday or so it should be completely safe to take a close look at the *Leviathan*.”

Pete looked at Bob in despair. “Bob! Help me! Say anything! Quick!”

“I can’t think of anything to say... except that Jupe has gone completely mad, but when has that ever stopped him?”

“Then we are in agreement,” said Jupiter with satisfaction.

3. A New Enemy

When Jupiter and Bob went to Bob's Beetle after school the next day to drive home, a young man stepped in their way. He was in his early twenties, had short blond hair and a scar on his left arm. He was Curtis Fisher. Like when they first met at the Waterside Police Department, he was wearing jeans and a red T-shirt and had a bunch of keys dangling from his hand.

He was not alone. Four other young men followed him and surrounded Jupiter and Bob. None of them looked friendly.

"Well, well, well," said Curtis with a broad grin. "Here's our fat boy Jupiter Jones. How's it going, kid?"

"Hello, Curtis," Jupiter said unimpressed, although all five were at least a head taller than him. "What do you want?"

"Isn't it obvious?" Curtis moved a little closer to him. "You have something that belongs to me. A key. Give it to me."

"A key?" Jupiter made a silly face—a trick that almost always worked. "What's key would that be?"

Unfortunately this time, the trick did not work. Curtis grabbed Jupiter by the collar and pulled him up close. "You know that very well, fatso. Such games don't work with me. Hand the key over or we'll go to your junkyard and smash your ridiculous headquarters to bits. You got that?"

"All right. Let me go and I'll give it to you!"

For a moment, Curtis looked downright disappointed that Jupiter gave up so quickly. Then he grinned and pushed the First Investigator back, bumping into Bob. "Well, here we go, you puny worm."

"I have it in my bag," Jupiter explained hastily and in an anxious voice. "Just a moment!" He put his bag on the ground and reached inside it. "Just a moment... Bob, T-T-M."

Bob, who had already wondered about the First Investigator's unusual docility, succinctly said: "Okay."

"What are you talking about?" growled Curtis. "Give me the key, now!"

"You can have it," replied Jupiter. His hand grasped something small, white—and as fast as lightning, he stood up and threw the object in the air. Stunned, Curtis and his four friends stared up and Jupiter and Bob dashed towards them 'T-T-M'—'through the middle'.

A second later, Curtis had caught the white object and his roar of rage sounded all over the school car park. "Stop them!"

Jupiter and Bob ran to the Beetle, ripped open the doors and threw themselves inside. Bob rammed the ignition key into the lock, turned it and stepped hard on the accelerator. The Beetle didn't do him the favour of dashing off with squealing tyres, but at least he rolled off, accompanied by the four young men's furious banging on the rear window and doors. Curtis yelled something and the four thugs stopped chasing the Beetle and returned to him.

Bob drove into the street and threaded himself into the traffic. "What on earth did you throw up there? Not the key?"

"My eraser." Jupiter grinned, turned around and saw the silver sports car and a red Ford following them. "However, things are getting a bit complicated now."

"You can say that again," Bob remarked. "I thought you said we didn't have to worry about Curtis Fisher."

"Actually, I thought so. Now, they'll probably follow us to the salvage yard and make trouble. We've got to get rid of them somehow."

"How did this guy even know we have the key? And come to think of it, how did he know about our headquarters?"

"Gerry," Jupiter replied succinctly. "That is the only explanation. Either Curtis got him or he was so angry about not being allowed to go into our trailer that he ran straight to Curtis and told him everything. In fact, we told him we suspected that Curtis wanted the model plane, and since he lives in Waterside, it wouldn't be difficult to find the mayor's son."

"Great," growled Bob. "That's just what we need in this case—more people who have something against us!"

"Fortunately, I have taken precautions in case something like this happened," Jupiter announced. "Drop me off around the next corner and drive straight to the salvage yard. Call Pete, hide the two plaster moulds and be prepared for trouble. I'll be there as soon as I can."

"Why? What are you up to?"

"I'll tell you later. Stop the car here!"

Bob stepped on the brakes. In no time, Jupiter was out, threw the door shut and rolled into the dusty ditch. The Beetle kept rattling on and a few seconds later, Jupiter, peering through the tall grass, saw something silver and something red passing by. Curtis did not see the First Investigator.

Jupiter stayed lying there until he was absolutely sure that the three cars were far away, then he got up and, under the disapproving looks of an elderly passer-by, knocked the dust off his trousers. Then he ran off.

When Bob drove into The Jones Salvage Yard, Pete was already there just getting out of his MG. Bob parked the Beetle next to the yard office, jumped out of the car and waved Pete over.

Bob went ahead to close the big wrought-iron yard gate, and just in time, the gate slammed shut right in front of Curtis's car. He braked abruptly, got out and yelled: "Hey! Open the gate, you cowardly rascals!"

Bob grinned at him. "Try to force us. Ever heard of trespassing?"

"I can't hear you," hissed Curtis. "Do you know who you're dealing with here?"

"Sure, I know. You're someone outside the gate," Bob replied as Pete joined him.

"And where has the fat boy gone? Has he—ha ha—chickened out? Hiding behind his friends?"

Bob was just thinking about what to answer when an angry voice behind him said: "What's this nonsense? What are those cars doing out there? You there, Bob—open the gate immediately! And get your cars out of here! This is a company compound, not an adventure playground!"

Pete and Bob turned around. There stood Jim in a blue work suit with a chainsaw in his hand and stared at them angrily.

"Uh—" Bob began.

"Didn't you hear me? Open the gate!"

Curtis took a step back and grinned. "That's right, children—open the gate, just like what the nice gentleman said. You don't want to scare away any customers, do you?"

"You're not a customer, Curtis," Bob said courageously. "You're nothing but a little scoundrel who's showing off! Jim, we're not opening the gate until these guys are gone!"

"Says who?" Curtis sneered. "Mister, you're gonna let a pipsqueak like that tell you what to do?"

"Don't listen to him, Jim!" Pete cried imploringly. "He's just trying to wind you up!"

"Open the gate, you two." Jim's face was as dark as a thundercloud. "Otherwise, I'll do it."

"No!" cried Bob. "Listen, these guys were picking on Jupiter and me on school property. They want to force us to give up something that doesn't concern them at all!"

"Oh, yeah?" hissed Curtis. "That's what you think. Listen, runt, that key is mine. It belongs to my family. You ever hear of John Fisher? He's my uncle who left something behind that needs that key. So it's my business!"

Bob swallowed. He hadn't expected this claim and what he should answer was beyond his comprehension. If what Curtis had said was true, then perhaps the key really did belong to him!

But Pete was not intimidated. "Even if it were so, first of all, Mr Shreber, whom you know very well because you broke into his house, asked us to find it... and second, we don't have the key at all—Jupiter has it. So we can't give it to you!"

"Enough of this rubbish!" barked Jim. "This is not the place for arguments. Get out of the way!" He pushed Bob and Pete aside, grabbed the latch on the gate, pushed it back and pulled the gate wings open.

Without hesitation, Pete and Bob threw themselves forward and closed their wings again.

Jim took a step back and gave them such an angry look that they became queasy. Then he put the chainsaw down on the ground, grabbed Bob's left arm and Pete's right arm and hauled them to the yard office. They stamped their feet into the ground and fought back, but he had strength like an ox and didn't budge from their resistance at all.

Bob twisted his neck and looked back.

"Bye-bye, children! Off to detention!" Curtis mocked them as he and his friends pushed open the gate and entered the yard.

Jupiter's uncle, who was sitting in front of his decrepit computer screen with a frown, looked up as Jim pushed open the door with his foot and shoved the two boys in front of him.

"What's wrong?" Titus asked, irritated. "What's all that noise out there?"

Jim replied curtly: "These junior investigators had just decided to fight a battle with a horde of hooligans. I told them this was the wrong place for that, but maybe you'll tell them again, Boss."

"How? Uh, yeah, guys, of course you can't. After all, this is a salvage yard... uh, not a battlefield. I mean, of course someone's always breaking in here or setting fire to something or throwing mysterious things over the fence, but... uh... where is Jupe?"

"Jupe will come as soon as he can," Bob said as he rubbed his aching arm furiously.

"And those guys have threatened to destroy our trailer!"

From outside, they heard laughter and then the howling of the chainsaw.

"Excuse me?" Uncle Titus said angrily and stood up. "But this is going too far. This is damage to property! Come on, Jim!"

Jim's face was worth gold. Apparently he had expected anything except for Uncle Titus taking sides with the boys. But he immediately regained his composure and followed Jupiter's uncle outside. Bob and Pete ran after them.

Curtis and his friends had just climbed up the mountain of scrap metal covering Headquarters. They had been wise not to take the chainsaw with them—the risk of slipping

and injuring themselves would have been too great. They only noticed Uncle Titus when he stopped next to the pile of junk.

“You there! Hello!” Titus shouted. “Come down from there immediately!”

The five looked down. “Look who’s here?” sneered Curtis. “Oh, I’m scared! Well, little man with a big moustache, tell the children to hand over my key or there’ll be trouble!”

Uncle Titus’s moustache bristled. “I don’t know anything about a key, but I know what kind of trouble you’ll get into if you don’t leave my property immediately! Get out!”

The five just laughed. Curtis sat down on a rusty bedstead and let his legs dangle. “Why? I find it very comfortable up here!”

“But not for long,” Jim said. “Bob or Pete—one of you come with me.”

Pete hesitated and nodded. “I’ll go. What are you doing?”

“You’ll see.”

Curtis’s friends now began to throw individual pieces of metal off the pile of scrap metal. In doing so, they only just missed Uncle Titus and Bob.

“Stop this immediately,” Uncle Titus cried angrily and reaped only mocking laughter.

Bob was terrified. With every piece of metal removed, the roof of Headquarters would be exposed. Those rascals had to see the roof hatch at any moment! And then no one could stop them from going into the trailer and destroying everything.

And then it happened. One of the hooligans reached for a pipe and stumbled. “Curtis!” He laughed. “Here’s the roof hatch, just like that kid said! Come here!”

“No!” Without thinking, Bob rushed forward. What he wanted to do against five thugs was not clear to him, but he could not leave their trailer to them without a fight!

Suddenly someone shouted out loud: “Curtis!”

All of them turned around. There the First Investigator stood and held up a key.

“Curtis!” he shouted again. “Here is the key! Leave us alone and I’ll give it to you willingly!”

Like earlier in the school car park, Curtis looked downright disappointed. “Irwin, get the key,” he instructed. “If this is another scam, Jones, we’re gonna smash this place to bits.”

“This is no scam,” Jupiter said aloud. “I’m giving you the key.”

“And the two plaster moulds,” Curtis demanded. “Otherwise you’ll make a new key for yourself. No, I’m not that stupid.”

“You can have the moulds as well,” Jupiter agreed. “Bob, please go and get it.”

Bob was thinking. He couldn’t use the Cold Gate because Curtis was standing right above it. But he couldn’t walk out through the gate, use Green Gate One in the fence and go through the open-air workshop, because Curtis and his friends would then have known immediately that there was an access from outside. No, he could only use the entrance they had already found—the roof hatch.

So he climbed onto the scrap heap and pushed his way to the roof hatch past the scornful faces of the new enemies. He flipped it up and let himself fall into the inside of the trailer. Hastily he looked around. On the table lay the two plaster moulds. He picked them up and handed them to a dark-haired guy who stared down the opening. After getting the two moulds, that guy grinned—and slammed the hatch with a loud crash just as Bob was about to pull himself back up. At the last second, he managed to pull his fingers away. But now he was stuck—he couldn’t leave Headquarters without betraying the secret passages.

Irwin, a lean, freckled lad with a big nose and small eyes, climbed down from the pile of junk and marched towards Jupiter. “Give me the key.” His voice was hoarse and as angry as his gaze.

“And then you leave us alone.”

“Yeah, right.”

Jupiter gave him the key and Curtis laughed from the top of the pile of junk. “Way to go, Irwin! And now come on—let’s take a closer look at the great detective office!”

“No!” Jim yelled from the storeroom. “I don’t think so. Pete—switch it on!”

And a second later, a jet of water shot out from a metal sprayer connected to a water jet pressure washer. It was strong enough to loosen dirt and debris from hard surfaces—or to drench five rascals from head to toe and drive them off the yard. Curtis and his friends stumbled down from the pile of junk, cursing, screaming and soaking wet, ran past Jupiter and through the gate, jumped into their cars and raced away.

Pete switched off the pressure washer. Bob left Headquarters from the roof hatch and The Three Investigators met in the middle of the huge puddle of water in the yard.

“That was great, Pete!” cried Bob.

“That wasn’t my idea,” Pete said. “Jim thought it might work.”

“Yeah, well, thanks, Jim,” Bob said.

That sounded much less enthusiastic, but the man just nodded. “And now hopefully you’ll drive your cars off the yard.”

“All right,” said Pete.

“That was very good, Jim,” said Uncle Titus. “So let’s get back to work, shall we?”

“Sure,” Jim said. “Before that, I’d like a word with you, Boss.”

The two men walked across the yard to the office. The Three Investigators looked at them leaving and Jupiter said: “He really helped us. I had not expected that.”

“Yes, but earlier he forced us to open the gate and let those guys in,” Bob growled. “Without him interfering, we could have prevented them from entering. Tell me, did you really give Curtis the key?”

“Of course not. I’ve got the real key right here in my pocket,” Jupiter grinned as he reached into this pocket and took out the key. “The one I gave Curtis is a fake metal key made just like this real one. Like Pete said earlier, it is hard to duplicate this key, so I got the locksmith to make one that looks like it but it won’t work. Also, Curtis is not going to get much out of the two moulds. You know what happens when plaster gets wet...”

4. Anuradha's Curse

"Ah," said Mr Castro, "there you are. Come on in." He held the door open and let The Three Investigators in.

Pete's grandfather had called and told them that his neighbour, chess and poker friend Castro actually knew something about the mysterious John Fisher. Since it was only Monday and they couldn't make the dive until Wednesday, they had immediately set off on their bikes.

Mr Castro, a skinny man with grey hair and a tanned, wrinkled face, was known to them mainly from the telephone calls that he had made to Pete's mother when his inventive and irritable friend was at odds with authorities and neighbours. Mr Castro had taken it upon himself to distract, console or calm Ben Peck until the family fire fighters—that is, Pete and his mother—arrived and restored peace, or at least tried to do so. This thankless task had made him nervous and anxious over the years, and he tended to constantly throw worried glances over to Grandpa Peck's house in tense anticipation of something happening.

But at the moment, there was peace in the street—there were no explosions or screams, and Mr Castro could devote himself to his guests in peace. He led them into the living room and offered them cold drinks. As they all sat comfortably in the armchairs, he said: "So you want to know something about John Fisher. Why? I thought you were on to something about Harry Shreber."

"That is true," said Jupiter. "Harry Shreber has left us a riddle that speaks of John Fisher. Fisher had pawned a pilot's watch at a pawn shop... and we found this scribbled in the box for the watch..." He took Mr Sapchevsky's photos out of his pocket and showed them to Mr Castro.

"Lt John Fisher, *USS Dauntless*," the elderly gentleman read. "'Moby Dick, 1-8, 4-2'... Uh-huh. Yes, I know that Harry knew this Fisher. They were stationed in India together. They were not necessarily friends... at least Harry never spoke kindly about him. I think there was an argument about a woman once, but that was a long time ago. Fisher died shortly after his return from India. He was a gambling addict, always broke and was a drunk, so nobody was particularly surprised when he crashed his car into a rock on a trip to Las Vegas."

The Three Investigators listened with concern.

"But that was not all," continued Mr Castro. "Harry once said that he and Fisher owed somebody something, and that didn't sound like our weekly gambling debts at poker, which regularly exceed the gross domestic product. It was something more serious and Harry sounded very depressed. But whatever it was, I'm stumped on that."

Now Jupiter pulled the Cochin photo out of his pocket and handed it to Mr Castro. "Do you know any of these people?"

"Yes—this is Harry." He pointed at one of the three men. "And this one here is one of his fellow pilots, what was his name? ... Manners? Martin?"

"Maybe Mason?" Jupiter asked in a harmless tone.

"What? No, not Mason. Ah, I got it now! Maruthers! Yes, that was the name—Maruthers. I don't know the third man, and I don't know the lady."

“Her name is Anuradha,” Bob said.

“A beautiful woman.” Mr Castro looked at her and said: “Yes, maybe she was the cause of the argument... or whatever it was that broke up Harry and his old buddies. But that was all so long ago. I don’t think there’s anything you can find out about them now.”

“We have already found out some things,” said Jupiter. “By the way, do you happen to know the Star of Kerala?”

“The what? No. What is that?”

“A famous gemstone that was part of the treasure of an Indian maharaja.”

“Never heard of it,” said Mr Castro regretfully. “I don’t know much about gemstones. Now, if you’re talking about postage stamps or bark beetles, maybe... but precious stones, no... Anything else I can help you with?”

“No, that’s all.” Jupiter stood up. “You have already helped us a lot. We have to be going now. Thank you very much.”

“You’re welcome,” Mr Castro said and accompanied them to the door. “Pete, if you’re going to see your grandpa now, please remind him that he still owes me a rematch.”

“I will, Mr Castro. Goodbye!”

“Maruthers?” Bob said as they stood in the street. “Our late pawn broker? I thought I was being kicked by a horse. How does he fit into the story now?”

“This is the part where we will try to figure out what happened back then,” replied Jupiter. “Let’s start from the facts we know so far. Three US Navy officers, namely Fisher, Shreber and Maruthers, spend their time in Cochin playing poker. The princess, who is not a princess, keeps them company. One day Fisher loses a valuable gemstone in a game to the lady. This precious stone comes from the treasure of a maharaja and had been stolen some time before. Fisher may have got the stone back, and Anuradha disappears without a trace.

“A little later, all three men come back to the US, where Maruthers joins his wife in running their pawn shop. Fisher is, as always, short of money and he gives his old friend a pilot watch as collateral and has a fatal accident before he can redeem it. Somehow, Harry Shreber gets hold of the pawn receipt.

“Years later, Maruthers dies and his widow sells everything that has not been redeemed, including the watch. Harry Shreber, who can easily redeem the pledged watch, does not do so, although he knows that a clue to the whereabouts of the gemstone is hidden with it—specifically on the box.”

“And how does he know this?” Bob interrupted.

Jupiter pondered. “Maruthers may have told him about it after Fisher’s death. He decides—for whatever reason—to do nothing. Instead, he himself hides clues to this watch in a riddle. But in his will he also writes: ‘It is my hope to make up for a mistake made many years ago, so that I don’t die completely dishonourable.’

“He wants someone to solve the riddle, find the gemstone, make up for a mistake made many years ago, and thus put everything in order. So the question is—why did Shreber feel guilty?”

“It’s obvious,” Bob said. “Because he was in cahoots with Fisher. They took the princess’s stone and they... they might have done something to her.”

“Does that mean we’re on the trail of murderers here?” Pete asked anxiously. “But all three men are already dead.”

“We can’t rule that out.” Jupiter got on his bike. “There is one more thing. Now that we know that the third man in the photo is Maruthers, do you know what I think?”

“Don’t ask us to guess,” Pete hastily answered. “Just tell us outright.”

“We now have two sets of numbers,” Jupiter began. “I think Maruthers has the third set. Bob, we’ll get your Beetle and pay Mrs Maruthers another visit.”

5. The Third Set of Numbers

Soon, they reached Mrs Maruthers's house. Nothing had changed since the last visit of The Three Investigators. The blue sky stretched cloudless over the hills, the sea and the pretty little houses and their hibiscus gardens. Apart from the buzzing of the cicadas and the chirping of some birds, nothing could be heard this time. The street was deserted and in the neighbouring gardens, there was silence. Obviously, no one here tended to laugh, shout or jump into pools screaming.

Again it took a while before Mrs Maruthers opened the door. This time she was not holding a rifle in her hands, but when she saw The Three Investigators, they had the feeling that she would get agitated. "You again! What do you want? I thought I have told you everything."

"We only have a few more questions, ma'am," said Jupiter in a soothing voice. Unfortunately his tone was of no use at all.

"You are not coming into my house! I read the newspaper, I know what happened to Mr Sapchevsky! I will not have you burn down my house as well!"

"Excuse me?" cried Pete. "That's not true at all! We didn't set fire to Mr Sapchevsky's house! Someone else did and we almost died in it!"

"Never mind, Pete," Jupiter said as diplomatically as he could. "Mrs Maruthers, we don't want to go into your house. We really only have a few questions, but they're important. Please, Mrs Maruthers. You're the only one who can help us!"

"Oh, yeah?" Mrs Maruthers didn't look convinced. "Well, what do you want to know?"

"Can you tell us what you or your husband knew about Harry Shreber and a gemstone—specifically a sapphire?"

Her wrinkled face froze. "No!" She hurriedly threw the door shut, but Jupiter shoved his foot to block the door from closing. "Ma'am, please—"

"No!" she screamed. "Get out of here or I'll call the police!"

"Mrs Maruthers, wait! All we need is—"

"No! Go away! Get away from me! Haven't I been through enough?" And to their horror, they heard the old lady burst into tears.

They looked at each other in dismay. "What now?" whispered Pete. "Shall we go?"

"No," Jupiter decided and carefully pushed the door open. "Mrs Maruthers..."

She had collapsed on a telephone bench and sobbed.

Desperate situations required desperate measures. Bob quickly searched for the kitchen, fetched a glass of water and offered it to Mrs Maruthers. At first she pushed it away, but after a while, she took it with a shaky hand and had a few sips. Pete took the glass from her again before she could drop it.

At last she stopped crying, sobbed just a few more times and then blew her nose in a handkerchief in a rather unladylike manner. "I'm sorry," she murmured, "but that... that came as a surprise. I haven't thought about it for so long, and I don't want to recall it at all..."

"Tell us," Jupiter said cautiously. "I promise you that we will not harm you. We want to help you."

"Oh, I... I don't need any help. I have never had anything to do with the cursed stone. But my—my husband and—" She sobbed again. It took her a while to regain her composure.

"Tell us," repeated Jupiter. "Regarding the stone, do you mean the Star of Kerala? The one which Mr Fisher lost to a woman named Anuradha while playing poker in India?"

"Yes," Mrs Maruthers replied laboriously. "I mean the Burning Crystal, the one... the one that ruined our lives. The stone is cursed!"

"There you go," mumbled Pete. "I had already wondered when I would finally be allowed to scare myself in this case. This has all been far too unspooky."

"What?" Mrs Maruthers asked.

"Pay no attention to him at all," Bob recommended. "Pete is our ghost and curse expert. Why is the stone cursed?"

Mrs Maruthers cast a suspicious glance at Pete, met an innocent look from his eyes and apparently decided to follow Bob's advice. "I only know what my husband told me. The stone came from a treasure that Fisher had found in India."

"Found?" Jupiter quickly interrupted. "Where?"

"He didn't tell me that. He said that Fisher gambled away his stone to that woman and she... she seemed to know the stone. She asked strange questions and suddenly my husband, Fisher and Harry Shreber were constantly being followed.

"After their assignment there, my husband came home and joined me to run the pawn shop. One day, John Fisher came to him. He said he was broke and needed money to pay for a flight somewhere. My husband wouldn't give him any money because he knew Fisher—he would never have paid it back. So he only gave him money for the pilot's watch as collateral and Fisher said it would only be enough for a trip to Las Vegas. There he wanted to win thousands of dollars or something like that to pay for the flight.

"My husband later told me that Fisher must have been drunk. He talked crazy, laughed all the time, but at the same time, he was terribly frightened and felt persecuted. 'The stone is cursed,' Fisher said. 'She is after me, Samuel'—that was my husband's name. 'She will not leave me alone until I am dead. It's her and that stone!' Then he drove off and a few days later, he had a car accident and died. And then—"

"Just a moment," Jupiter interrupted. "By 'she', did he mean Anuradha?"

"I think so. I do not know for sure. Who else could it be?" Mrs Maruthers said. "Anyway, I told my husband then that we should inform Fisher's family to claim the watch back. And he did, but no one ever came."

"Regarding the watch, we found that John Fisher scribbled something inside the box that said 'Moby Dick' followed by some numbers," Jupe asked. "Did your husband also have something written somewhere that had the name 'Moby Dick' and some numbers?"

"Uh..." Mrs Maruthers mumbled. "Uh... in fact, he did. I just happened to see it the other day when I checked the record of the watch for Mr Sapchevsky's address."

Jupe beamed and said: "It's important that we get those numbers, Mrs Maruthers."

"You can go get the blue record book over there in that top drawer," Mrs Maruthers said.

Bob walked over, opened the top drawer and took out an old record book.

"Look for the number 73-08-63," Jupiter said.

Bob flipped through the book and found the page. Towards the bottom, he saw it:

Moby Dick

3-4, 5-9

"Got it," Bob exclaimed. "'Moby Dick 3-4, 5-9'"

“Great!” Jupiter remarked. “Now we should have all the numbers. Okay, Mrs Maruthers... could you tell us what happened next.”

“What happened next?” Mrs Maruthers repeated and thought briefly. “Some time later, my husband got sick. The doctors couldn’t help him. No one knew what it was, just us. It was the curse that woman put on the stone. Anyone who comes in contact with it must die. And that’s what happened.” She sobbed again. “My husband died.”

“Did he ever touch the stone?” Bob asked cautiously.

“Yes, that’s it. It seemed that they swore over that stone that they would never reveal the hiding place of the treasure to anyone... and that... and that killed them all.”

“But Mr Shreber died a natural death,” Pete objected.

Mrs Maruthers laughed hollowly and shivers ran down the boys’ spines. “Did they tell you that? Yes, of course, they would never tell outsiders the truth! But I spoke to Mr Mason, his secretary. He found Harry Shreber, you know. And he said Harry’s face was completely distorted—like he saw something... something horrible... and the shock of it killed him.”

6. Rachel

“Okay,” Pete said, “this has gone way too far.”

“Good thing you said that,” Bob added, “or I would have said it myself. Jupe, can we please go back to looking for runaway cats?”

The First Investigator did not answer. It was almost dark now, and they were standing in front of Mrs Maruthers’s house. Above them, the stars glittered in the velvet black sky and only in the west was there still a golden green afterglow of the sun. A cool wind rushed in the trees along the road.

“This case is really not for us,” Pete started again. “We are stumbling from one mortal danger to the next. First, we dealt with a demon, then with murderers and now with a curse! And all because of some stupid treasure!”

“Well, if anything, it’s because of a treasure,” Jupiter said absent-mindedly.

“Yes, fine, it’s for a treasure. Who cares!” Pete said. “This case is at least ten sizes too big for us! That Shreber was crazy to hire us! I would have preferred a million bucks!”

“Well, so would I,” Bob agreed. “Jupe, we cannot solve this case. We just can’t do it!”

“Why not?” asked Jupiter.

“Because... because it is just too much!” Bob exclaimed. “I’ve already forgotten half of everything we found out and I don’t understand the other half! We have so many clues and leads and suspects that we are suffocating in them! If I had known that this was going to be such a mess, I never would have got involved!”

“So? But our motto says ‘We Investigate Anything’. We’ll look for runaway cats or take on the CIA—whatever is necessary. And this case simply has more unknown factors than usual. As long as I am keeping track of the situation, you should not worry.”

“You are still keeping track of the situation?” Pete wondered.

“Of course,” Jupiter said.

“And you also know exactly which suspect is now ‘more suspicious’ or ‘less suspicious’ or ‘not suspicious at all’?” Pete continued.

“I know that someone who has been previously unsuspicious is suddenly considerably suspicious.”

“Oh? And who could that be?” Pete asked.

“You should know that, even if you have forgotten half of our findings. It just jumps right out at you.”

“Nothing jumps right out at me at all,” Pete grumbled, “only my mother, if I don’t go home soon.”

“All right,” said Jupiter, “then we’ll call it a day. Tomorrow we’ll get together and pack our equipment.”

The Three Investigators did not expect Curtis to turn up again to bother them as he might not have discovered so soon that the key was a fake. So they spent Tuesday afternoon peacefully checking their diving equipment and having their scuba tanks refilled. As their mobile phones were all taken by Angelica, Jupiter managed to find a spare one for their journey.

On Wednesday, after managing to fit all their diving equipment into Pete's MG, they set off for San Diego. The sky was bright blue, but over Los Angeles, it turned yellow.

"Crazy," said Pete as they drove through Los Angeles. "The city is under a smog bell, but the government is spending tens of thousands of dollars to create an artificial reef. Strange form of environmental protection, if you ask me."

"It's probably cheaper than just letting a giant ship like that rust in a harbour or taking it apart," Bob said. "And fighting the smog probably costs even more."

Both expected Jupiter to dig into his phenomenal memory and explain to them in detail the advantages and disadvantages of this type of metal disposal, but Jupiter sat in the passenger seat quietly, pinching his lower lip and staring out the window.

"Did you pack the big wrench?" he asked all of a sudden.

"Yes, as you wanted," Pete replied. "I just don't know what for. We can't fend off sharks and moray eels with that, and it's unlikely that the treasure chest is simply bolted down."

"Sharks and moray eels are not likely to be found at the wreck yet," Jupiter said, without paying attention to the banter. "Have you looked at the map carefully?" He had downloaded from the Internet a still rather incomplete map showing the location of the wreck. They had also studied all the old and new photos that existed of the *Leviathan*. It was strange to see the huge ship in old photos and then see the same shapes and outlines in the deep blue water.

"Sure," Pete said. "I could swim through it with my eyes closed."

"Don't underestimate the task. Under water, you can easily lose your sense of direction. Have you checked the lamps?"

"Jupe, it's not the first time we go diving! Of course I have checked the lamps!"

"Really, Jupe," said Bob, "this will work out fine! We dive around a bit, and when we see a treasure chest, we open it, get the treasure out and leave. Very simple."

But Jupiter shook his head. "I don't think we will find a straightforward treasure chest. The workers who gutted the ship would never have missed something like that! We will first look for clues—characters on the walls or something like that... Perhaps the series of numbers we have are for leading us to the treasure chest... and the key is for opening it... Anyway, we're not taking any chances."

"We never do," Pete said sarcastically. "Why us? Didn't you say you wanted to steer the boat while we two dive?"

"That's what I had in mind, but I hope we can find someone to take us in his boat and then I'll dive too. When we get to the harbour, keep an eye out for a motorboat or yacht named *Rachel*."

"*Rachel*? Where did you come up with that?" Pete gasped. "Why would there be a boat of this name in San Diego Harbour today of all days?"

"Because the *Leviathan* has perished," Jupiter said.

Pete moaned. "I give up. If you feel like expressing yourself in a generally understandable way again, let me know!"

Jupiter sighed. "I am quite serious. I have read *Moby Dick* and I expect that there is a ship or boat called *Rachel* in the harbour whose owner will help us—just as Elijah came to the car park to give us mysterious warnings. Is that so hard to understand?"

"Yes," Pete replied.

"Children, don'ticker," Bob said. "You better enjoy the good weather—it won't last until evening!"

They looked out the window. The sky was still blue, but had taken on a slightly metallic shimmer over the sea. If they were lucky, it would just be a field of grey clouds; if they were unlucky, it would be a storm.

After two hours, they reached San Diego. Pete parked his car and they walked briskly along the harbour. At one of the piers, there were three groups of divers loading their boats.

Jupiter approached a man in a diving suit directly. "Excuse me, sir, are you going to the *Leviathan*?"

"Indeed." The man smiled at him. He was about thirty years old and looked so sporty and tanned as if he had spent his whole life at sea. "That's a change from searching for Spanish doubloons between rotting wooden planks! This baby is huge!"

"But you won't find any doubloons there."

The man laughed. "That's not what we're doing. We care about diving. This is going to be great! What about you—don't you want to try it? Surely you can dive?"

"We can dive," replied Jupiter, "and we'll go out there too, but we're still waiting for our boat—the *Rachel*. Have you seen her by any chance?"

"*Rachel*? Nah, never heard of it. Hey, guys! Do any of you guys know a boat named *Rachel*?"

The other divers turned to them. One woman said: "No, but there's a boat back there called *Rachel's Delight*, if that helps you."

Jupiter grinned all over his round face. "This is even better. Thanks a lot! Come on, fellas!" He pulled Pete and Bob away from the divers to the direction the woman had pointed to them.

"I don't believe it," cried Pete as they stood shortly afterwards in front of a racy white motorboat with the name *Rachel's Delight* on the bow. "How on earth did you know that?"

"It was easy to expect," said the First Investigator. "That's what the book said. Shortly before the sinking, Ahab's ship, the *Pequod*, meets three other whaling ships. One is called *Samuel Enderby*; the second, *Delight*; and the third, *Rachel*. And after Moby Dick has sunk the *Pequod*, *Rachel* is the ship that rescued Ishmael—the only survivor—out of the water. And that is why I assume that the owner of this motorboat will take us to the wreck of the *Leviathan* with great pleasure and also free of charge."

"So this boat belongs to—Ishmael?" Pete stared at the boat and still couldn't believe it.

"Good thinking, Pete." Jupiter said and then jumped down onto the deck. At that moment, the door to the cabin opened and out stepped... Ishmael!

"There you are," he greeted them as if nothing unusual had happened at all since the last meeting. "But I would appreciate it if you wouldn't call me Ishmael anymore, but Nat. The game has served its purpose and now it is over. Come in! We have a lot to talk about."

7. A Story about Greed and Fear

A little later, The Three Investigators were sitting on the narrow bunk bed in the cabin, and Ishmael—or rather Nat—sat opposite them on an equally narrow bolted bench. He no longer looked as tired and dishevelled as he did five days ago in his house, but his cheek was adorned with a scraped bruise that gradually turned yellow. Wearing a dark blue jumper, white trousers and white shoes, he seemed to feel completely at home on his boat.

The boat itself, however, showed no traces of personality. It had a simple wooden interior, was clean and tidy, and pictures or personal belongings were nowhere to be seen. Apart from a few drinks he had offered to The Three Investigators, Nat didn't seem to have brought anything on board. He seemed quite friendly, but The Three Investigators still didn't know what to make of him.

“First I must apologize to you,” he said. “I left you in my house in an unpleasant situation. I’m sorry that I could not prevent it.”

“And we are sorry about your basement door,” said Jupiter. “But since we had to assume that your life was in danger, we had to break out from there.”

“Oh, don’t worry about the door. It can be replaced easily. But what happened after you got out?”

“We went to the Salome Police Station and there, Sergeant Madhu from Waterside picked us up. Then we came here to San Diego and tried to stop the Navy from sinking the *Leviathan* because we thought you and the others were on board.”

Nat hesitated and suddenly looked embarrassed. “Yes... hmm... thanks. I’m afraid I’ve inadvertently led you on a wrong track...”

But now Pete couldn’t hold on to himself and blurted out: “We thought you were dead! We went completely crazy because we couldn’t save you and those criminals! Now I want to have an explanation what this is all about! All this games with Ishmael and Elijah and Moby Dick and *Leviathan* and Rashura and the fake princess and old men chasing gemstones. Who are you, Nat? What do you have to do with all this? I want to know what’s going on now!”

Bob nodded.

“I think I’ve got some of it figured out,” Jupiter said, “but I agree with my colleagues, Nat... We probably have a right to know what this is all about.”

“You really do,” said Nat. “What I am about to tell you was from Harry Shreber, but he did not tell me all at the same time, but over the years...”

The Three Investigators nodded.

“You probably know about the maharaja’s treasure, which was stolen from his treasury about forty years ago.”

The Three Investigators nodded again.

“What you may not know is that the woman named Anuradha was an undercover agent of the Indian government. She was always hanging around Cochin’s gambling halls. In a short time, she had built up a dazzling reputation as a gambler and alleged princess. Eventually she got to know John Fisher, and she was often seen at his poker games. There was where she met Harry Shreber and Samuel Maruthers.

“At one of these games, Fisher placed a bet using the Star of Kerala. Anuradha put all her possessions on the line and won. Later, she persuaded Fisher to tell her where he had got it from. He said that he had found it and other jewels in an abandoned temple in the interior of the country. She urged him to take her there. He did not want to at first, but then gave in.

“Fisher finally took Anuradha to the abandoned temple. Shreber and Maruthers went along. Fisher showed Anuradha a handful of jewels. She seemed to know that there were more and asked him to show her the rest. There and then, Fisher got into an argument with her and found out that she was an agent of the government.

“Fisher was furious, feeling exploited and betrayed. In fear of being convicted, he grabbed back the Star and in the tussle, he accidentally pushed her down a deep crevice in front of his friends. Shreber and Maruthers were appalled. The three of them desperately tried to rescue her but failed because they did not have light and equipment. In addition, they heard hissing sounds like that made by snakes. Fearing that she was dead, Fisher took back the Star and the few jewels, and the three of them left the temple.

“Back on the ship, Shreber and Maruthers were furious with Fisher and were scared as well. The thought of being accessories to manslaughter terrified them especially when they had nothing to do with it. They forced Fisher to reveal what it was all about. He told them that he was paid by someone to smuggle the jewels out of India. Although they heard Anuradha asking Fisher for the rest of the jewels, he insisted that there weren’t any.

“Fisher felt guilty of killing Anuradha. Shreber and Maruthers were not easy with the situation either. They felt that Fisher had to somehow make a confession and pondered over reporting to the police.

“Finally, with Fisher pleading them, they decided not to say anything. The investigation and possible penalty would probably have kept them in India for the rest of their lives. To protect themselves, Shreber and Maruthers demanded a signed confession from Fisher that he alone was responsible for the incident and that they had nothing to do with it.

“Shreber and Maruthers believed Fisher’s story that the Star of Kerala and a handful of jewels were all to it. They also urged him not to take the jewels out of India. Fisher finally convinced them that he would secure the confession letter and the jewels in a secret location.

“Fisher purchased a small safe with a combination lock of six digits. He put the sealed confession and the jewels, including the Star, inside. Then he gave two of the digits each to Shreber and Maruthers. Nobody except Fisher knew all the digits of the combination lock. Shreber then contacted a mechanic friend on the *USS Leviathan* and gave him the small safe. He paid the mechanic to hide the safe securely on the ship.”

“And that mechanic was you,” Jupiter interrupted.

Nat nodded. “I was barely eighteen then. I had made friends with Harry Shreber and I could use a little money so I was happy to do him the favour. I did it by welding the safe in an obscure location. At that time, I was only told very little as to what it was all about, and I never knew any of the digits of the combination lock. What I am telling you now, only came much later.”

“Why did they want it done this way,” Bob asked.

“All three of them swore not to reveal the secret and wanted to leave the matter to some kind of divine judgement,” Nat continued. “By that, they meant that if the *Leviathan* was sunk or destroyed, the secret would be preserved. If instead she returned to the US intact, they could still consider what to do. Fisher agreed, but he had hoped that the secret would never be revealed at all. All he cared about was getting his head out of the noose.

“Meanwhile, in the eyes of the public, Anuradha had disappeared. Rumours started circulating that she was involved in the theft of the maharaja’s treasure. The connection was

that she had the authority to enter and leave the palace.

“Very soon, the *Dauntless* and the *Leviathan* were ordered home. Just before the ships sailed out of Cochin, the three men heard that Anuradha was branded a traitor and a warrant was issued for her arrest. However, the three men knew that should not be so, but again, they were too scared to come out and tell the truth. Eventually they left. The ships’ journey back to the US was long as they stopped by other ports along the way.

“Back in the US, none of the three went aboard the *Leviathan*, and the ship was back at sea two days later. They then decided not to touch the safe and its contents, and I was told to forget the whole story.

“After that, I heard nothing for some time until one day, Shreber told me that Fisher had died in an accident. Then he revealed to me what I have just told you and more...

“Prior to Fisher’s death, he was still distraught over the killing. That worked in him and the nightmares he had made him believe that a curse was set upon him by Anuradha. He again contemplated coming clean to rid himself of the curse and nightmares, but did not know what to do.

“As always, Fisher was short of money. One day, he decided to pawn his pilot watch at Maruthers’s pawn shop. He then gave the receipt to Shreber for safekeeping.

“Unexpectedly, Fisher died in an accident. His closest relative was his brother, Charles, who was then the deputy mayor of Waterside. They never had good relations with each other. Charles Fisher was making his way up the political ladder to take over from the retiring mayor, and he did not want anything to do with his drunkard brother as that might jeopardize his political position.

“As a result, Shreber and Maruthers volunteered to handle Fisher’s funeral and his estate. When clearing Fisher’s rented home, Shreber and Maruthers found sacks and sacks of jewels. They were shocked beyond words and were furious that Fisher had lied to them. They suspected that he went back to the temple to retrieve the rest of the jewels in order to fulfil his part of the smuggling deal. He was probably waiting to hand over the jewels but he died unexpectedly.

“Anyway, Shreber and Maruthers did not want anything to do with the treasure, especially when they fear the curse that it would bring. They also did not want the jewels discovered as that would lead to the Anuradha killing. It made matters worse as the one responsible had already died. If anything, they would need Fisher’s confession letter to clear them—but it was out at sea with the *Leviathan*.”

“How can we understand this?” Bob asked. “There is a safe with jewels that those responsible want nothing to do with, and you weren’t tempted to go and get them?”

“No,” Nat said. “I do not want anything to do with stolen items. Moreover, I was uneasy about the story as Shreber told me that those jewels had already claimed a human life. For several years, we all pretended that the jewels did not exist. But then Shreber’s wife and daughter died, and soon after, Maruthers became ill and died as well. Shreber got scared. He got it into his head that the Star of Kerala was cursed and when I laughed at him for that, he told me to get lost.

“It was only shortly before his death that he contacted me by phone and told me the rest of the story including Fisher’s sacks of jewels. In addition, he claimed that he was being persecuted by a demon called Rashura, which Anuradha’s vengeful spirit had set upon him. He was completely confused and asked me for advice. He wanted to go to the police and report himself, but at the same time he was afraid to do so. He told me that I should not tell anybody anything, since I was somehow involved in it myself and so on.

“While I was still thinking about what to advise him, I found out that he had died. And then I was surprised to learn that he had left a will engaging you three to settle this issue for him. This is something I do not understand. He knew that the search for the Star of Kerala and the jewels was dangerous. Why did he involve you?”

“Apparently my grandfather was telling him how smart, capable and great we are,” Pete replied, “so that’s one of the ways we always get into such predicaments.”

“And what was the point of playing with Ishmael, Moby Dick and so on,” Bob asked.

“That was an old game between us, because I was the youngest member on the *Leviathan*, just like Ishmael on the *Pequod*. For fun, Shreber once called me ‘Ishmael’ and for some reason, the name stuck. Later, he used terms from the story as code words to avoid having to talk openly about the jewels and Anuradha’s disappearance. The *Leviathan* was ‘Moby Dick’, and John Fisher was ‘Ahab’, who had dragged us all down with him. I didn’t think it was funny, but Shreber couldn’t be dissuaded.”

“But you did play along,” Bob interjected. “You came to us and introduced yourself as ‘Ishmael’.”

“That’s right.” Nat took a sip of water and sighed. “After learning of the will and knowing that Shreber had hired you—”

“Just a moment,” Jupiter interrupted. “How did you know that?”

“From his grandson, Gerry. We are good friends.”

“Gerry? But you said you didn’t know him,” Bob exclaimed.

“No, I didn’t say that. I asked if I should know him. That’s something completely different.”

“That’s all well and good,” said Jupiter. “But it is still not logical. Mr Shreber could have avoided all this trouble by going to the police himself. He was an old man, and he hardly would have been charged with complicity or embezzlement... Or if he was afraid of the consequences, he could have requested you in his will to go to the police...”

“That was precisely what it was,” Nat said. “He did ask me to do just that—but to only do so after he had died... but I refused. As much as Shreber was my friend, I refused to be dragged into an issue that happened so long ago. Firstly, I was not involved in any stealing or killing, and secondly, I would be left alone to answer for it. To be fair to me, when I agreed to hide the safe in the *Leviathan*, I was not told that there were stolen items in it, let alone, jewels, and I also didn’t know that somebody was killed for that.”

“So what did he do when you refused,” Bob asked.

“He did not tell me the rest of the story, including where the rest of the jewels were located,” Nat said. “He said that he would get some investigators to help him, and he asked me for one last favour and that was to help you if you got stuck. I really believe that he wanted this issue cleared up even after he had gone.”

“But why did you start off doing that and then later avoid talking to us?” Pete asked.

“All along, I was against bringing back this issue to the surface,” Nat explained. “But when Shreber died, I thought about his last wish and decided to see how it went with you guys. So I had a change of mind and decided to play along. That way I could keep an eye on you and at the same time put you to the test a bit. So I gave you the hint with the note and asked Gerry to take it from you. We both actually thought that you would give up right there and then.”

“That’s how you can be wrong,” Bob said philosophically.

“Yes,” Nat continued. “Eventually, I sensed that you lost a lot of time dealing with the Rashura gang, and the *Leviathan* was to be sunk. So I decided not to proceed and hope that you would finally stop pursuing the case.”

"There's still the big question that needs an answer," Jupiter said. "Where are the rest of the jewels?"

"Like I said, Shreber did not tell me," Nat replied. "After I refused to be involved, he decided to put the clues in his will, which I do not have access to."

"That would be the riddle he gave us," Bob said. "He mentioned a certain 'resting place'."

"What exactly did he say?" Nat asked.

"The riddle said something like: 'The key to it all can be found in something which once flew,' and that we are to ask you about Moby Dick and go the way you send us—all the way to the 'resting place,'" Bob recalled.

"The key is in something which once flew?" Nat wondered. "That would be a plane... and the 'resting place'... that could very well be... the resting place of Fisher's plane!"

"But we already have—" Pete began.

"—Hold on a second!" Jupe quickly interrupted him. "Is Fisher's plane also decommissioned?"

"Yes, almost all the planes from that time, if not all, have been decommissioned and possibly scrapped," Nat said, "but Fisher's plane was preserved."

"Really?" Bob exclaimed. "Where is it?"

"Near Pima, where I now work part-time," Nat said.

"You think that the rest of the jewels is in Fisher's plane?" Bob asked.

"I don't know," Nat said. "As I told you, Shreber did not tell me."

"Anyway, we have to take one thing at a time and get to the safe on the *Leviathan* first," Jupe decided. "Then we will tackle the rest of the jewels, but we have to act quick. Nat, one question—am I right in thinking that you lured Smith, Taylor and Angelica here so that they would be picked up by the Navy harbour patrol?"

Nat nodded with a slight grin. "Yes. I convinced them to get to the *Leviathan* by boat and then, when the patrol boat came, I fell into the water with a loud splash. As I was tied up, I had problems staying up, but I'm a good swimmer. The patrol guards fished me out, arrested the three of them, questioned me and let me go."

"And we were worried!" Bob said.

"Yes, like I said—I'm sorry about that."

"Where are the three now?" Jupiter asked further.

"They were detained by the authorities. In any case, we are rid of them for now."

"That leaves Rashura," Jupiter added. "I think we can safely assume that he is not a demon that Anuradha's vengeful spirit has sent after Mr Fisher and his friends. He is a human being, and he is desperate to get his hands on the treasure."

Nat nodded seriously. "And he is very dangerous. Nobody knows who he is, not even those who work for him—that much I learned from Smith and Taylor during the trip here. Rashura wants the Burning Crystal and the rest of the jewels, and he will stop at nothing to get them."

"One last thing, Nat," Jupe said. "Why are you helping us now?"

"This thing will not end unless Rashura is behind bars," Nat said calmly. "As I have explained to you, I did not want to be involved... but since his people now know who I am, I am dragged into the picture. Therefore, if I can help fulfil Harry Shreber's last wish, that's the least I could do for him. I really don't know much about Rashura, but I'll help to get him." He didn't even raise his voice, but cold shivers ran down Pete's and Bob's spine.

"All right," said Jupiter. "Will you take us out to the *Leviathan* so we can dive?"

"I intend to, yes," Nat said. "However, I suppose you know the combination lock digits of the safe else the dive would be useless even if you manage to locate the safe."

"Yes," Jupiter replied. "We have the digits."

"And you have memorized them?" Nat asked.

"Of course."

"Jupiter has a photographic memory," Bob explained. "If he looks at a hamburger for just five seconds, he'll remember what it looked like for the rest of his life."

Nat laughed. "That's all right, then."

"Good," Jupe remarked. "Now let's go get our gear. Come on, fellas."

8. A Suspicious White Yacht

The sky had turned grey and the sun was only faintly visible. The sea was grey as steel. Seagulls sailed screeching over their heads, carried by the refreshing wind. It didn't look inviting at all and it certainly wasn't tempting to go diving.

The Three Investigators marched to their car and took out their diving equipment from the boot. The pier was now almost empty as the other divers had left long ago.

"So we now know that the series of numbers are the digits of a combination lock," Jupe said. "We have '2-7, 6-3' from Shreber, '1-8, 4-2' from Fisher, and '3-4, 5-9' from Maruthers. Altogether, there are six pairs of digits. Since Nat says that the combination lock has six digits, the first number of each pair is for indicating the order. So putting them together in order, we have: 1-8, 2-7, 3-4, 4-2, 5-9, 6-3... and that means that the six-digit combination is 8-7-4-2-9-3."

"Wonderful!" Bob remarked. "Did you notice that Nat didn't mention the need for a key? Where does it come into play?"

"Yes," Pete interrupted. "Jupe, why did you stop me from telling Nat that we found the key in Shreber's plane?"

"I'd rather be cautious," Jupiter explained. "Yes, Nat didn't say anything about a key but he mentioned that the rest of the jewels could be in Fisher's plane. In any case, he might be right. This key might be required to unlock something in Fisher's plane. Anyway, we'll tackle that after our dive."

"It's a good thing that the Rashura gang has been detained," Bob remarked. "Do you trust Nat to bring us out to the wreck?"

"Don't forget Rashura himself is still at large," Pete said. "Maybe Nat is him—and then we'll be alone with him at sea!"

"But there are three of us," Bob said. "If necessary, we throw him overboard. And besides that, we are not alone. There are still at least three groups of divers with their boats out there. He can't do anything to us."

"Despite telling us that he was not interested in the jewels, if he were Rashura, he could have got to the treasure years ago," Jupiter said soberly. "He doesn't need us for that."

"Does he even need us at all?" Pete wondered. "Maybe he just wants to get rid of us as we now know what he's got to do with all this."

"You mean besides Rashura and his accomplices," Bob remarked.

"The accomplices are under lock and key," Pete added.

"Probably not all of them," Bob slowly said. "Look over there." He pointed to a slender white yacht which was slowly sailing through the bay about a kilometre away. The sail was not hoisted but the yacht looked as if it could easily take on the Pacific Ocean.

Jupiter and Pete followed his gaze.

"The yacht?" Pete asked. "What about it? I can't see anything special."

Bob shrugged his shoulders uneasily. "Maybe I'm wrong, but the yacht on which Angelica gave me the poison looked a lot like this one."

"Do you know the yacht's name?" Jupiter asked.

“No. I was blindfolded all the time, and when they brought me ashore using the motorboat, the yacht was too far away. I couldn’t read the name.”

Jupiter watched thoughtfully as the yacht sailed towards the sea, following in the wide arc path that the *Fiesta* had taken the other day with The Three Investigators on board. “It could also be a coincidence,” Jupe said.

Bob grinned crookedly. “I thought you didn’t believe in coincidences.”

“I don’t,” Jupe remarked.

They packed their things and returned to Nat at *Rachel’s Delight*. While they changed in the cabin, Nat started the engine and steered off. Slowly the motorboat chugged through the harbour. Through the windows, The Three Investigators saw towers and cranes that they remembered from their trip on the *Fiesta*. Then the white yacht came into sight again and they watched intently as she came closer and closer.

Soon they could decipher the name on the bow—*Ruby*. The man standing at the wheel wore dark glasses and had a peaked cap low over his forehead so they could not ascertain he was anyone they knew. He was tall and broad-shouldered, wore a dark jumper and black trousers. He just cast an indifferent glance at *Rachel’s Delight* as he passed.

“All right, it probably wasn’t the same yacht.” Bob kept his eyes on the *Ruby* as long as he could, then reluctantly turned away. “Still, I don’t like it.”

“Oh, there are thousands of white yachts.” Pete put on his neoprene jacket. “I’m sure this is just any one of them. Jupe, could it be that you’ve put on weight?”

“Oh no,” murmured the First Investigator as he struggled with the zip. “It’s just something that got caught on there.”

Bob came to his aid, but it took three of them to close the jacket. “Nice!” Bob said. “Like a corset. Jupiter Jones, First Investigator, shapely and purposeless.”

“That’s not fair,” Jupiter gasped. “Even if I breathe in, this thing will burst! It must have shrunk the last time it was washed!”

“You don’t wash neoprene, and it doesn’t shrink.” Bob was glad to be able to steer his thoughts away from the white yacht and towards Jupiter’s weight problems. “I guess this is payback for your last peanut butter diet.”

“Why? I followed the diet after the strictest—” Jupiter did not get any further.

Completely unexpectedly *Rachel’s Delight* turned hard to starboard. The Three Investigators lost their balance and fell over each other. Immediately afterwards something like a white wall slid past the port windows, followed by a bow wave that made the boat dance like a cork.

Then it was over. The white wall had disappeared, the waves calmed down. Pete, who had been standing close to the window, looked out and saw the *Ruby* racing away in a wave of foaming spray.

When they came back on deck, Nat said: “Sorry, I couldn’t warn you. That guy suddenly accelerated as if he was going to ram us, and I could barely swerve. Are you all right?”

“We’re okay,” Jupiter said. “Did you get a good look at him?”

“No, the rascal just waved at me.” Angrily, Nat stared at the *Ruby*, who was now far ahead of them and just about to dash out into the open sea.

“I don’t know,” Bob said. “I don’t have a good feeling—”

“Go to the railing,” Pete recommended to him.

Bob grinned a little laboriously. “I am not seasick! I just think we should hurry.”

“I think so too,” Nat said and accelerated.

A short time later, they were at sea. The sky was now lead grey, the waves long and dark. The *Ruby* was a bright white spot in all that grey. Soon there could be no doubt that she too

was heading for the wreck of the *Leviathan*.

“Are you really quite sure that Smith and his people are still being detained?” Pete asked Nat.

“As far as I know, yes,” said Nat sincerely.

After half an hour, they saw the boats of the diving groups that had gone out in front of them. They were lying close together and the three boatmen had got into one boat and were talking among themselves. The *Ruby* lay a little way off. No one was seen on deck.

On their last trip out here on Saturday, The Three Investigators had not taken a detailed look at the surroundings. Now they looked around and had a better idea of their position. They were not as far from the mainland as expected. The *Leviathan* had been sunk in a large bay, which lay like a stage in front of a semi-circle of wooded cliffs. The waves broke foaming against a row of needle-sharp rocks. It wasn’t a bad place for a new reef—but all thoughts of environmental protection and wildlife vanished in an instant when Nat positioned his boat near a buoy and said: “We’re here. Welcome to Ghost Bay.”

9. Dive in Ghost Bay

“What bay?” Pete asked.

“Ghost Bay,” repeated Nat. “Don’t look at me like that—I didn’t give it that name!”

“Why is it called Ghost Bay?” Pete asked, laboriously restrained.

“I have no idea. It’s probably one of those names whose origin is forgotten, like ‘Deadman’s Island’ or ‘Skull Valley’.” Darkly he looked out at the water. “But I can think of three ghosts whose secret lies down there.”

“Look at the rocks back there,” Bob said. “I could well imagine that a few ships once got caught there and sank. Maybe there were even smugglers and beachcombers who lured them into the trap with false light signals. And then there are probably the ghosts of the drowned —”

“Bob,” Pete said threateningly.

“—Sailors who roam over the water on dark, foggy nights, lamenting—”

“Bob!”

“—And reaching out to you with their cold, pale bone fingers—Ow! Okay, okay, I’m stopping.”

“Well, it’s still daytime, so we have nothing to worry about,” said Nat with a barely hidden smile. “It does look a little like fog, though, so—”

“Go ahead and make fun of me,” said Pete. “But when you meet one of those roaming ghosts, don’t say I didn’t warn you!”

Impatiently, Jupiter put an end to the ghost talk. “Let us look at the map once more. If I’m not mistaken, we are now almost over the stern of the *Leviathan*.”

Involuntarily they all looked at the water and Bob peered over the railing, but apart from the buoy, the grey waves and the reflection of *Rachel’s Delight*, there was nothing else. But now they all felt uncomfortable. Maybe it was Bob’s made-up ghost story; maybe it was the thought of the wreck in the depths; maybe it was the disturbing presence of the *Ruby*... in any case, they would all be glad to have this dive behind them.

“The other divers are likely to be near the command tower,” said Nat, “but I welded the safe at the stern, so it’s pretty much right here.” He pointed to a spot on the map. “They gutted the hull, but it’s not a huge empty hall, if that’s what you are expecting. There are still many individual rooms and several large chambers, all flooded of course. The steel doors are open. Here you swim through this opening, dive through three chambers, then a door leads to the left. Behind it you will find the safe. It’s quite far inside the ship, so the explosions should not have damaged it.”

“That is if no one has removed it earlier,” said Jupiter.

“I have attached it in such a way that it looks as if it is part of a steel beam. I don’t think anyone noticed it at all,” Nat said. “I should dive by myself. I don’t like you going down there alone.”

“Oh, we’ll manage,” Bob said. “We’re not beginners.”

“Nevertheless, I’d rather draw the route for you again.” He left Pete the steering wheel, took a pen out of his pocket and drew the exact route they were to follow on the ship’s layout plan. “Here.”

“Thank you,” said Jupiter.

They carefully studied the route once more. Then Jupiter inserted the layout plan unfolded into a waterproof and transparent zip seal bag so that it could be used under water. After that, he rolled it up and put it in a tubular container which he had attached to his belt. Nat took the wheel again and watched the three of them put on their scuba tanks, diving goggles, and snorkels, and checked the lamps once more.

“Take care of yourselves.” Nat looked so worried that The Three Investigators lost their suspicion for a moment. Bob optimistically stuck his thumb in the air, Pete hung a rope around his neck, and then they climbed down the ladder at the stern and slid into the cold water. Jupiter gave a hand signal and they dived.

Under water, it was just as grey and bleak as above. No sunlight sent golden rays into the depth, and no glittering shoals of fish whizzed by. In fact, there were only a few fish to be seen.

Pete looked down. Twenty metres below him, indistinguishable in all this grey, a gigantic mass of steel rose up. It was the stern of the *Leviathan*. The ship was not tilted to one side, but rested upright on the seabed. The superstructures had been completely removed and only the hull with the former command tower was left.

From the buoy next to them, a thick rope led into the depths. The Three Investigators switched on their lamps and swam down following the rope, accompanied only by the bubbling of their breaths in an otherwise undisturbed silence.

As they descended deeper, they recognized the thick steel cables leading from the wreck to gigantic anchors so they did not need to fear a delayed overturning of the colossus.

They saw nothing of the other divers. The command tower was only fifty metres away, but the water was too murky to see it. But they soon discovered the opening that Nat had spoken of—it was as big as a garage door. Individual fish glided past it as if they couldn’t make up their minds whether to swim in or not. The Three Investigators made the decision for them. As they came closer, the fish darted away.

Jupiter shone his lamp into the opening. Further ahead was a small room with an open door. He swam in and immediately headed for the door. Bob followed. Pete conscientiously knotted the end of his rope to a strut and let it unwind carefully while he swam behind his colleagues. Although he trusted Nat’s route and Jupiter’s memory, a rope could not only help them find their way around, but it could also save their lives if the lamps broke or they had to hurry outside quickly for some other reason.

The Three Investigators were experienced divers. They had been under water many times before—sometimes for treasure hunting in wrecks. But never before had they been on a ship the size of a small village. And because it had been sunk only four days ago, no mussels or algae had settled down yet. Here and there were a few stones, a little sand, but the cupboards, work consoles and tables that had not been dismantled looked frighteningly new, as if a sailor could swim in at any time and continue his work.

That thought made Pete shudder, so he decided to focus on something else. What if Smith, Taylor and Angelica had actually been on board after all... What if Nat had lied... Angrily he called himself to order. He didn’t like Nat much and didn’t trust him either, but what reason could the man have to lie? Exactly. None at all.

The only thing they could encounter in this gigantic wreck were other divers and perhaps the odd great white shark that could tear them to pieces. But there should be no ghosts... At least, that was reassuring. He had never heard of underwater ghosts anyway. Maybe ghosts

were water-soluble and melted immediately when they came into contact with water. "Great, Pete," he thought. "Keep it up, and when you get back up, you'll be ready for the loony bin!"

Jupiter and Bob were already one room further on, he had to hurry if he didn't want to be left behind. Carefully he led the rope through another door opening, turned around and faced a monster.

It was a fish almost a metre long with an arrow-like straight body, piercing, evil eyes and a huge mouth with razor-sharp fangs.

It was a barracuda!

Pete froze. He did not dare to lower the lamp and lose sight of the fish. The barracuda floated motionless in the right corner of the room. Perhaps Jupiter and Bob hadn't seen it, or perhaps they had already swum out through the opposite door. Pete knew that barracudas wouldn't actually eat people but they were very aggressive and could inflict horrible wounds with a single bite... which then would attract the sharks.

Without letting the fish out of his sight, Pete glided infinitely slowly forward and to the left, in a large arc around it. His heart was pounding. The fish did not move, its stare following the light. And then it made a single lightning-fast movement with its tail, shot past Pete through the door and was gone.

With the snorkel in his mouth, Pete could not swallow well and the cold water prevented him from getting hot, but the reaction would probably come later.

Bob appeared in the doorway and waved to him. Pete quickly swam ahead, feeling as if he had just aged years—to at least twenty.

"Are you all right?" Bob asked by a show of hands.

Pete put the tips of his thumb and index finger to each other and spread three fingers apart indicating: "I am okay. Go on!"

Two rooms away, they found the safe. As Nat had described it, it was fixed like a square swallow's nest on a steel beam at a height of about three metres from the ground. It was probably not visible from the ground level because it was blocked by a metal locker. But now it was easily accessible. Pete forgot about the barracuda and would have loved to give a cheerful scream. They had reached their goal—finally! After all the drudgery and danger, they had finally made it!

He and Bob watched excitedly as Jupiter swam up above the locker. In the meantime, the sea was no longer quiet. Soft sounds came from all sides, carried far across the water. Nearby, metal struck metal as if an object had fallen down. The Three Investigators flinched and listened, but the sound was not repeated.

Jupiter looked at the safe and saw six rotary dials and a handle, but there was no keyhole. So the key had to be for something else. Anyway, he proceeded to turn the dials one by one following the six digits: 8-7-4-2-9-3. After he set the last digit, he turned the handle, and the door of the safe opened. A flood of air bubbles followed as the water plunged into the safe. Jupiter reached in and took out a small pouch. Fisher hadn't made much of an effort to wrap the treasure in a watertight package, perhaps he wouldn't have expected the pouch to be completely soaked.

Under the pouch was a sealed envelope. It was already wet. Jupiter laboriously pulled down the zip of his neoprene jacket, pushed the envelope inside and pulled the zip up again just as laboriously. Then he slid down from the locker to Pete and Bob. In the glow of their lamps, he opened the pouch.

Inside was a handful of precious stones that looked strangely pale and insignificant in the white light. Only one did not—a plum-sized, pink and orange stone whose facets caught the light and transformed it into pure fire.

There it was! They had found the Star of Kerala—the Burning Crystal, sapphire, whatever... Despite all the dangers and adversities, they had done it!

Pete saw his own enthusiasm reflected in the eyes of his friends. He stuck his thumb in the air, and that meant: "Great! Let's get out of here!"

Jupiter nodded, closed the pouch and pushed it into the container attached to his belt. Then they turned around, swung their lamps to the door—and found themselves facing two divers with harpoons pointing at them!

Every movement froze. The room suddenly seemed to be much too narrow. One of the divers swung the harpoon slightly and stretched out his hand. The message was clear. Jupiter reluctantly opened the container and pulled out the pouch. The man swam towards him, grabbed the pouch, opened it and looked inside to check the contents. Then the man snatched the lamp from him as well. Jupiter made a protesting movement—and the harpoon went off.

The metal arrow with the murderous tip shot just under Jupiter's arm and pierced straight into the wall. Jupiter flinched violently and the diver pulled the arrow by the attached rope back towards him. Pete and Bob were so shocked that they had their lamps taken without resistance. In addition, the diver got hold of Pete's rope as well.

The two divers slid backwards towards the door, with the second harpoon still aimed at the three boys. The diver with the pouch swam out first. The second diver followed, pulled Pete's rope out and pushed the door shut.

Inside the room, The Three Investigators were in absolute darkness. Then they heard the divers ram something under the door to prevent it from opening. The next moment, it became quiet on the outside. Pete groped his way to the door and tried to open it, but it wouldn't budge.

The Three Investigators were trapped in the *Leviathan*!

10. Escape from the *Leviathan*

Pete realized that he was a strange scaredy-cat. The thought of ghosts, demons and devils literally made his hair stand on end, but now that they were indeed in very real danger, he remained calm and did not lose his nerve.

For a brief moment, he even felt something like triumph when he unhooked his second light source—a small flashlight—from his belt. As he did so, he heard his diving instructor's voice: 'Never go into the water without a spare lamp—the first lamp can break at any time, and then your life depends on the second lamp!' Pete congratulated himself on having listened to his instructor and switched on the flashlight. The light flickered and solidified. The battery would not last long, but it was enough for the moment.

Hastily Jupiter and Bob turned to him and Bob raised his hand: "Great, Pete!" Now they could communicate, and that was urgently needed if Bob's joke about Ghost Bay was not to become gruesome truth.

They swam down to the bottom of the door and Pete held the flashlight close to the finger-wide gap. There was an obstruction—probably a piece of metal—placed on the outside. They tried to push it away with their fingers, then with the wrench from Bob's belt, but it didn't move.

The wrench gave Bob an idea. He used it to hit the steel door—three times short, three times long, three times short—SOS—Help! He repeated this several times. If there were divers nearby, they had to hear it.

Tensed, they waited, but there was no reply and no one removed the obstruction to save them. Pete took a look at his watch. They had been under water for half an hour. The air in their scuba tanks was enough for an hour—no problem as long as nobody panicked and they could remove that wretched obstruction!

He noticed a movement and looked up. Jupiter pointed to the flashlight and then to himself. Pete handed him the flashlight and the First Investigator shone around in the water-filled room. The faint beam of light stayed on a metal tube at first, but they immediately realized that it was too thick. The light moved on, up to the safe and then around the room where there were a few metal lockers. Jupe pointed to one of the lockers and the three of them swam there. Bob opened the door and found that the locker was empty. There was nothing here that could help them—or was there?

Jupiter knocked against the locker door and pointed to the wrench and the gap under the main door. It took Pete and Bob a moment to understand what he meant, and they nodded eagerly. With combined forces, they lifted the locker door out of its mounting. Every movement was as slow as if they were swimming through honey. Every pressure created counter-pressure.

As Jupe estimated, the thickness of the locker door was thinner than the gap. However, it took the three of them a while to coordinate and place one edge of the locker door into the gap under the main door. Pete took the wrench and banged it against the edge of the locker door.

Bang! ... Bang! ... Bang!

Every swing of the wrench was slow, but the impact was so loud that it hurt in their ears. The noise echoed through the wreck, but the improvised tool did not move. Pete decided not to panic. It should work. It had to work. Even if it didn't work, someone nearby would hear the banging—but it should work.

Bang! ... Bang! ... Bang!

On the last blow, the wrench slipped off and Pete's wrist scraped painfully along the edge of the locker door. He stared at his wrist in horror, but the skin was not injured and there was no blood.

He imagined all the sharks in the proximity greedily sniffing through the water and turning away disappointed. In case the sharks decided to check if there was anything tasty in the *Leviathan* even without blood, Pete continued to hit as hard as he could.

Bang! ... Bang! ... Bang! He could feel some movement.

Bang! Suddenly, the locker door jerked forward and pushed the obstruction away, but it now wedged itself in the gap. But that was no problem. Jupe and Bob wiggled the locker door side to side while Pete pulled it at the same time, and finally they got it out of the gap.

Jupiter turned the handle of the main door and it swung out slowly, against the pressure of the water.

Bob shone the flashlight out and they saw the obstruction and also Pete's rope that the divers had left there. At that very moment, the flashlight went out.

Pete groped around for the rope and held tight to it. The rope was the only way for them to get out of this predicament in the darkness. Slowly and carefully, he moved ahead following the rope. He had decided not to panic and refused to think about a whole pack of barracudas lurking in the darkness. Instead, he just focussed on the rope, grasping ahead with one hand in front of the other.

Bob, who was just behind Pete, also got hold of the rope, and followed the movements of Pete's diving fins. Jupiter brought up the rear.

Finally, they got a glimpse of light in front of them. They crossed the last room and left the *Leviathan* through the opening that they came in.

They would have loved to shoot up immediately, but they knew that such carelessness could have harmful consequences. So they slowly climbed up the buoy rope and stopped again and again to get used to the changing water pressure. Soon they saw the surface of the water, and then finally they appeared beside the buoy. They looked around for Nat's motorboat and experienced a nasty surprise.

It was gone! Not a single boat was to be seen far and wide. *Rachel's Delight* and the three small motorboats of the diving groups were no longer there. The sky was sulphur yellow and dark grey, and when The Three Investigators pulled their diving goggles off their faces and gasped for air, a lightning bolt flashed across the sky. Following that was a deafening thunder, and it started to rain.

“What if we swim ashore?” cried Bob. In the crash of thunder and the crackling rain, his words were barely audible. “With the wetsuits and the air in our cylinders, it should be possible!”

“Much too far!” Pete yelled back. “And even if we make it to the coast, the waves would smash us onto the rocks!”

“Let's wait for Nat!” cried Jupiter. “He must come back sometime!”

“Forget it!” yelled Bob. “He let us down! I bet he was working with Rashura all along!” A wave splashed into his mouth, he coughed and spat and tried to get the taste of salt out of his mouth.

“I don't believe it!” cried Jupiter.

“Look, Jupe,” Bob continued. “It might be true that Nat didn’t know the combination lock digits for opening the safe. We told him we did, and as soon as we got the treasure, two of Rashura’s people turned up at the exact room where the safe was located. Whether you believe it or not, that can’t be a coincidence!”

Jupiter fell silent.

They tied themselves to the buoy with Pete’s rope. It was no good as a life raft, and as soon as all three of them clung on to it, it sank, but they had nothing else. They took turns as best as they could, but it was to be seen when their strength would run out.

“If only I had listened to my mother,” Pete puffed in a short break from the thunderstorm.

“What did she say?” Bob asked.

“I don’t know. I wasn’t listening.”

This made them laugh, but they didn’t really feel like laughing. This time they were really in trouble—big trouble.

When it was Jupiter’s turn to hold on to the buoy, he hooked on and pulled something white from his neoprene jacket. It was a completely soaked envelope with a red seal.

“It doesn’t matter now,” he explained and tore open the envelope. “It’s probably unreadable anyway...” He unfolded the letter and the wind almost tore the sheet from his wet, frozen hands. “Yes, I can! I can still read most of it! Wait, let me read it to you...”

It was probably the most uncomfortable situation in which he had ever had to read something. They were drifting in the sea, holding each other and the buoy, rain whipped in their faces, and dark grey clouds drifted above them. At least the thunderstorm gradually moved away and it got a little brighter so that Jupiter could make out the runny writing:

I, John Benjamin Fisher of Waterside, California, hereby declare that I alone am responsible for the unfortunate incident on... (here it is illegible)... Kerala. I was at this place with my friends, Harry Shreber, Samuel Maruthers, and Anuradha, a local lady whom I... (Goodness, this is all just a smeared mush! Here it goes on)... jewels hidden in this temple, I had an argument... (illegible again)... accidentally pushed her down a crevice. My friends and I tried to rescue her but to no avail. I was too distraught to... (illegible)... my friends, Harry and Samuel had no part in this matter.

*Signed,
John Benjamin Fisher*

“And we will take this knowledge with us to the grave,” said Pete.

“... Or not.” Bob raised his arm out of the water. “There’s something back there! A light.”

From the coast, a white light approached deep above the grey waves.

“A helicopter!” cried Pete. “The Coast Guard! Hey! Hello! Here we are!”

They were all screaming. The helicopter pilot didn’t seem to know what he was looking for, because he was zig-zagging and searching the sea with his spotlight. Pete waved like crazy. “Here! Here we are! Save us!”

The roar of the rotor blades became louder and eventually drowned out any other noise. The helicopter stopped in the air above them and the vortex pushed the waves flat and the buoy half under water.

A man appeared in the side door and immediately afterwards, a rope ladder fell down to them. Hastily, Pete loosened himself from his rope, grabbed the rope ladder and laboriously climbed up. As soon as he reached the helicopter, Bob climbed up. Inside the helicopter, both of them were immediately welcomed with warm blankets and drinks.

Jupiter was last to climb up, and with the strong wind, he swayed and struggled. Suddenly, a gust of wind tore the letter from his hand and he desperately reached out wildly to grab it. He lost his grip on the ladder and fell into the water as the wind blew the letter away over the foaming waves.

It took another five minutes before the rescue personnel fished him out and hauled him upwards with a winch. He looked so miserable as if he had swallowed litres of seawater. The men wrapped him in blankets and dried him until he said, weakly but angrily: "I am fine. I am all right! But the letter! I should have held on to it better!"

"Jupe!" Bob said. "Forget the letter! The three of them are all dead! It's for the best!" He immediately regretted his words.

The men of the Coast Guard turned and stared at him in disbelief. "Who is dead? For goodness' sake, what happened?"

"Uh..." Bob began.

"No one," Jupiter said hastily. "Bob was referring to something else, he just meant—"

"Listen, if there are still people down there—" the man began.

"No, not at all! We were alone. Someone stole our boat and—"

The men looked at him sincerely. "Listen, boy. We've received a call that three boys diving to the wreck of the *Leviathan* are in trouble. If there are more people down there and if you don't tell us, you'll be in a lot of trouble!"

"No," Jupiter said exhaustedly. "There is nobody. We are investigators and we are working on a case that is forty years old. What Bob remarked earlier was that those involved have been dead for years and—"

"This is getting more and more confusing," said one of the men. "We'll take you to the hospital for now."

"Who called you, anyway?" Jupe asked.

"A Mr Ishmael Rubyfellow... No, wait, Rubyfellow or something like that..."

"Rubyfellow?" whispered Pete, who was now so cold that his teeth chattered. "Is he going after that yacht?" The men didn't hear him, but as a precaution, Jupiter quickly put his finger on his lips.

The helicopter flew over the skyscrapers of San Diego and landed on the roof of a hospital five minutes later. There The Three Investigators were examined, X-rayed, questioned, warmed up and packed into three hospital beds, where they fell asleep immediately.

11. A Visit to Captain Murphy

“Tell me,” asked Mr Andrews, “do you think it would help if we tied you up, gagged you, locked you up at home, sold your cars and bicycles, and forbade you to even think of words like ‘riddle’, ‘mystery’ or ‘investigation’?”

“No,” Bob said.

His father sighed. “I thought so. Can you tell me what else desperate parents should do?”

Bob looked down at his blanket. Pete didn’t know what to say either.

When The Three Investigators woke up from their confused dreams, Mr Andrews was by Bob’s bed and told them that the police had called him and told him where he could pick up his wayward offspring and his equally wayward friends.

But Jupiter could not be dissuaded. “You could help us, Mr Andrews,” he suggested.

“We must find a particular military plane that was stationed on the aircraft carrier *Dauntless* in the 1970s. It was flown by a Navy pilot by the name of John Fisher. As far as we know, the plane has been decommissioned and is now in the Pima Air & Space Museum in Tucson. However, we need to know exactly which plane it is.”

Mr Andrews had listened to him with growing disbelief, and now the storm was breaking.

“Jupiter Jones!” he thundered. “Have you gone completely mad? Do you have any idea what we’ve been going through these past two weeks, while you’ve been throwing yourselves from one deadly situation to the next without thinking for a second? And now you want me to help you?”

Pete and Bob ducked their heads, but Jupiter remained calm. “I’m sorry, Mr Andrews,” he said. “Of course we didn’t want you to worry. But I must protest against your insinuation that we haven’t thought about it. In fact, we have given this a great deal of thought, and have almost solved a very tricky, complicated and decades-old case. So—”

“Did we?” asked Pete, stunned, and hastily added: “I mean, did we solve the case?”

“I said ‘almost’,” Jupiter clarified.

Mr Andrews shook his head. “I don’t want to hear any more of this. Here are fresh T-shirts and jeans. When you’re ready, get up, get dressed, and we’re going home.”

“I have to go get my car...” Pete began.

“Then you just follow us.” Bob’s father got up and left the room. No sooner was he gone than Pete and Bob turned to Jupiter.

“Is that true?” Bob asked. “The case is almost solved? Does that mean you know where the treasure is?”

“It should be at the ‘resting place’ but we have to ascertain where that is,” Jupe said. “Nat gave a plausible suggestion that it could be Fisher’s plane. He knows which plane it is at Pima, but we don’t. Now, he’s disappeared.”

“How about if we call Pima and ask them,” Bob suggested.

“We could try,” Jupe replied, “but I don’t think that they would have such specific records of each plane they have there.”

“What about the other issues?” Bob asked. “Do you have any idea who Rashura might be?”

“No, not that yet,” Jupiter had to admit. “But the circle of suspects is quite small now, right?”

“Ishmael,” Pete said confidently. “I mean Nat... Mr Rubyfollow, don’t make me laugh! He deliberately abandoned us to get his hands on the treasure himself! We could have drowned because of him!”

“If he had wanted that, he would not have alerted the Coast Guard,” Jupiter said. “He must have seen the divers returning to the *Ruby*. Maybe he didn’t know we were trapped and just wanted to follow the yacht to see where it was going.”

“That doesn’t convince me,” said Pete sincerely. “For me, Nat is the villain in this game, and if I see him again, he’ll be in for a real treat!”

“Pete, Pete,” said Bob, shaking his head. “Is this the way an investigator talks? If he really is Rashura, we should beat him with our brains, not our fists.”

“But it hurts more with fists,” Pete argued.

“Well, I’d be happier if he were to spend the rest of his life behind bars.” Bob swung his legs out of the bed. “Come on, I’m hungry. Maybe my father will let us go somewhere and get something to eat.”

“I’m going with Pete,” Jupiter announced and got out of bed as well. “And if you happen not to see us behind you at some point, don’t worry.”

Pete looked at him suspiciously. “What are you up to?”

“Nothing,” Jupiter said innocently. “It can always happen that you accidentally lose your way going home, right?”

After this gentle hint, Bob was not surprised when his father looked in the rear-view mirror just outside San Diego and made a remark: “Those brats! Where are they now?”

“I’m sure they’ll catch up with us very soon,” Bob said harmlessly, although he had been wondering all along what Jupiter was up to.

His father gave him a mobile phone. “Give them a call.”

Bob dialled the number and waited, but nobody answered. He knew Jupe well enough to do something like that. In fact, Bob was actually relieved about this even though he was eager to know where his two friends were.

“We’re waiting,” Mr Andrews decided and steered the car to the side of the road. But after ten minutes, he gave up. “I’m not going to wait around here all day. Let them get grilled at home—I don’t care!” And with this, he started his car, accelerated and drove home along the coastal road.

“So what exactly are we doing now,” Pete asked as he drove all over San Diego, according to Jupiter’s instructions.

“We’re visiting Captain Murphy.”

“I see... that is obvious.” Pete waited, but Jupiter just pinched his lower lip. “Who is Captain Murphy?”

“He used to be the captain of the *Leviathan*. He is also the elderly gentleman who paid for our third ticket on the *Fiesta* and then gave us his card.”

“Oh, him. And what do you want from him?”

“Ask him for a favour,” Jupe replied.

Pete, who knew Jupiter as well as Bob, knew that there was no point in asking any further questions. And soon, they stopped in front of the fifteen-storey apartment building where the captain lived. It was high enough to allow a view over the entire San Diego Bay.

Jupiter pressed the button on the intercom and a short time later, a voice came on: "Yes? Who is that?"

"Jupiter Jones and Pete Crenshaw, sir. Remember us? We're the investigators you were kind enough to pay for the ride on the *Fiesta*."

"Ah yes, of course," said Captain Murphy. "Come up here. Twelfth floor." It buzzed and Jupiter pushed the door open.

They went up in the lift and Captain Murphy welcomed them at the front door. He was not wearing his uniform, of course, but comfortable trousers, a shirt and sandals.

"This is a surprise," he said. "I didn't think I'd see you again, but weren't there three of you?"

"Bob is unfortunately unable to come," replied Jupiter. "We would like to ask you a few questions, sir."

"Of course. Come on in."

The captain's apartment was nicely and comfortably furnished. On the walls were pictures of ships—old sailing ships and paddle steamers, modern motorboats and also the *Leviathan* in an impressive poster.

"It's an amazing ship, isn't it?" said Captain Murphy. "Not pretty, of course. Most modern ships are abysmally ugly. But they serve their purpose... Tea?"

"No thanks," Jupiter said and Pete shook his head.

"Okay." The captain waved them over to the sofa and sat on a chair. "So tell me what you want from me."

"If we tell you directly, you'll throw us out immediately," said Jupiter. "So first I'll beat around the bush and tell you about our case."

The captain raised his eyebrows. "At least nobody can say you're not honest. All right, I've been warned. Shoot."

"We are on the trail of a Navy pilot named John Fisher. He was stationed in the early 1970s in the port city of Cochin in the Indian state of Kerala."

"Hmm... The name John Fisher doesn't ring a bell, but at that time, I wasn't in command of the *Leviathan*, which is what this is all about, right?"

"He was not on the *Leviathan*, but on the *USS Dauntless*. On the *Leviathan* at the time was a mechanic named Nathan Holbrook."

"Nat? Yeah, I remember him. He was still there in my day. What about him? He must be, by now—good gracious—he must be in his fifties, I think."

"He hid something on the *Leviathan* that was obtained by John Fisher and two friends of his," Jupe continued. "They had put him up to it, and we had the job of finding the hiding place and getting the items out of it."

Now Captain Murphy pulled his eyebrows together. "I see. That explains your interest in the *Leviathan*... and the people you thought were on board during the sinking—are they with you?"

Captain Murphy was not stupid, but one did not become a captain of a warship if one could not think fast and draw conclusions.

"No, sir," said Jupiter. "They are associated with someone named Rashura who wanted to get ahead of us. They didn't succeed, but they managed to take the items from us after we found it yesterday."

"Of course, I always keep an eye out for news about my former ships," Captain Murphy said slowly. "I didn't expect anything about the *Leviathan*, but this morning the news said that the Coast Guard had rescued three boys out of the sea there."

"That was us," Jupiter confirmed. "And Nathan Holbrook was the man who took us there. When we came back up from the dive, he was gone."

The captain said nothing. He just leaned back with his arms crossed and looked at the two investigators.

Jupiter continued: "We assume that he was pursuing the criminals. And if you can answer a few questions for us, we would know where they went. Perhaps Mr Holbrook has let us down, or perhaps his life is in danger. Rashura and his people have proven many times that they will stop at nothing to achieve their goal."

"And what goal would that be... when they've already taken the items from you?"

"This is still John Fisher's secret at the moment, sir," Jupe said. "To unravel it, we need to know where his plane is now after it was decommissioned. Unfortunately, we do not know the former captain of the *Dauntless*. Therefore, we have decided to ask for your help."

That was new to Pete, but he kept silent and made an intelligent face, as if he knew exactly what Jupiter was talking about.

"Aha," said Captain Murphy. "And why don't you ask that John Fisher yourself?"

"Because he died many years ago, sir. His two friends are also no longer alive."

The old man looked out of the window for a while, thinking. Finally he turned back to them. "And for whom do you seek to unravel this secret?"

"One of the two friends, Harry Shreber, left a will engaging us to settle a decades-old issue for him."

"Well, that's odd. In the first place, he could have just got Nat Holbrook to get the stuff out of the hiding place before the *Leviathan* was sunk. There's more to the story, isn't there?"

"Yes, sir," replied Jupiter, "but I'm afraid we can't tell you anything about that."

"I see. So it comes down to you wanting me to snoop around the Navy records for you to find Fisher's plane."

"Uh... yes, sir."

The captain stood up and stepped to the window. Meaningfully, he looked out over the bay and then turned around again. "You are right. If you had asked me to do this earlier, I would have thrown you out immediately. Now, of course, I'm curious too, but it's out of the question for me to go to the naval base and rummage through the archives for a couple of amateur investigators who, in my eyes, have so far distinguished themselves mainly by unsubstantiated claims and unprovable suppositions... and have only told me half the story."

"But sir—" Jupiter began stubbornly.

"No, I'm sorry. That's not gonna happen at all." He took a break and looked at the disappointed faces of the two boys. Then he went on: "After all, that's what the telephone is for."

Jupiter and Pete could not believe their ears.

Captain Murphy sat down and pulled out his telephone, which was on a side table. He picked up the handset and keyed a number. While he waited, he looked at the boys, who were watching him just as tense, and smiled.

Then he spoke: "Good morning, Mrs Jenks. This is Murphy. How are you? ... I'm glad to hear it... Yes, can you connect me to the archives, please? ... Thank you."

There was a short pause and his voice became business-like. "Good morning. This is Rear Admiral Bernard James Murphy, USN, Retired. Can you check something for me? ... Yes, of course, I'll give you my ID." He then gave a number.

"I want to find out what happened to a particular plane that was aboard the *USS Dauntless*. It was flown by a pilot named John Fisher in the early 1970s. I understand that the

plane has been decommissioned... Yes. Thanks... Call me back." He gave his phone number and then hung up. "There. Now we have to wait a while. Sure you don't want a drink?"

"Maybe water after all," Pete said weakly. "Rear Admiral? But on the *Fiesta*, you were wearing a captain's uniform..."

"On the *Leviathan*, I was only a captain. When you're an admiral, it always gets so formal, and I've had enough of that for a lifetime." The old man grinned. "But it's still enough to give orders to poor file clerks." He got up, got some drinks from the kitchen and put them in front of Pete and Jupiter.

"Have you ever been to Cochin, sir?" Jupiter asked.

"Yes, but only later—I think in the late seventies to early eighties."

"Have you heard anything about a Star of Kerala there? Or about a woman named Anuradha?"

"Star of Kerala? No, but Anuradha... yes. She was—" The telephone ringing interrupted him. He picked up the phone.

"Yes? ... Good. Yes, that's what I wanted to know... And the code number?" Captain Murphy listened and scribbled a few letters and numbers on a piece of paper. "Thank you, you've been very helpful." He hung up.

"So, you investigators. The planes that survived their missions on the *Dauntless* were partly scrapped and partly sold in the 1980s and 1990s. But the plane you're looking for is standing near Tucson in one of the world's largest aircraft graveyards. Here is the identification number of the plane." He handed the First Investigator the piece of paper.

"Thank you, sir," said Jupiter. "You have really helped us a lot! But what did you want to say about Anuradha?"

"Oh, nothing. I recalled some rumours when I was in Cochin way back then. Some said that she was an outcast princess and a secret agent of the government." He laughed. "But I have also heard that she was one of the most cunning jewel thieves of that time!"

12. Confusing Information

Back at home, as expected, there was trouble and prolonged debates about the responsibilities of a team of junior investigators that, as Aunt Mathilda insisted, should not involve playing James Bond and should not require rescue by the police or military from the dangers of death. She was undoubtedly right about this and Jupiter refrained from reminding her of The Three Investigators' motto: 'We Investigate Anything'. If it had been up to Aunt Mathilda, he would have had to immediately change their motto to: 'We investigate anything that is not dangerous, can be solved by a little deliberation and won't stop us from doing our chores'.

"Didn't you start off as a puzzle-solving club?" she continued. "Whatever happened to your tinkering with harmless riddles and little adventures looking for runaway cats? Why must you constantly throw yourselves into dangerous situations?"

"That is unfair," said Jupiter as he related his conversation with Aunt Mathilda to Pete and Bob the next day when they met at Headquarters. "Sure, our cases have never been without danger... but I couldn't tell her that. She was not in the mood for rational arguments."

"But we're going on, aren't we?" Bob asked. "We've come so far now, we're not just going to throw it all away!"

"I agree," said Pete. "What else can happen? We have long since used up our supply of life-threatening situations."

Bob grinned. "Ladies and gentlemen, you have just heard the latest from our 'Famous Last Words' department."

"Actually, a lot can still happen," said Jupiter, "because if we don't find out what is really going on here, there is no point for us to go looking for the Star of Kerala again."

Pete and Bob looked at him in amazement. "Excuse me?" Bob asked. "But we've already found out everything!"

"So? How about you summarize it for us," Jupiter urged.

"Mr Shreber hired us to find the Star of Kerala and make up for a mistake," Bob began.

"What mistake?" Jupiter probed.

"That he and Samuel Maruthers did not go to the police at that time and report John Fisher."

"And how are we gonna make it up to them?"

"By going to the police, right?"

"And what happens if we go to the police and report on three men who have all died?"

"Uh... they're gonna ask for proof."

"What proof do we have?"

Bob thought for a while and finally had to admit: "None."

"This is one of our problems," Jupiter continued. "Then the next—who is Rashura and what does he want?"

"Jupe, I thought that was already clear!" said Pete. "Rashura wants the treasure!"

"And who is he?"

Pete hesitated. "Nat?"

“You’re only saying that because you’re angry with him,” Jupe argued. “But think logically—even if Nat didn’t know the combination lock digits, he could still have taken the safe out and broke it to get at the jewels—long before the *Leviathan* was sunk. And do you really think that he would let Smith, Taylor and Angelica mistreat him for two days if they worked for Rashura and he was Rashura himself? And why would Angelica want to force Bob to hand over Nat to them if he is their boss? No, it just doesn’t fit.”

“Well, when you say it like that—” Pete wondered.

“Then there’s one more thing. Who stole the treasure?” Jupe asked.

“Sergeant Madhu said that someone in the palace must have been involved,” Bob recalled.

“According to Nat, John Fisher claimed that he was paid by someone to smuggle the jewels out of India,” Pete added. “That could be the person who stole the treasure.”

“And who, for example?” Jupe questioned. “A notorious jewel thief who called herself a princess?”

“But Nat said she was an undercover agent!” Bob exclaimed.

“There you go... Sergeant Madhu said this, Nat said that, Mrs Maruthers told us something, Mr Mason told us something, Captain Murphy said something else again and John Fisher left a sealed confession. There are lots of confusing information we have been given. For all you know, it is even possible that someone is systematically and deliberately not telling us everything.”

Bob and Pete stared at Jupe.

“And who would that be?” Pete finally asked.

“I do not know yet. It could also be more than one person. We need to re-verify all the statements we have received.”

“All right,” said Pete. “Are we going to reopen the whole case from the beginning or what?”

“No, we just have to look at individual facts. And since we cannot get some information ourselves, it is time to visit our trusted friend and source of information, Inspector Cotta.”

“Pardon?” said Inspector Cotta incredulously. “I should do what? Have you gone mad?”

“Not at all, sir,” said Jupiter. “It’s just that without your help we can’t get the necessary information.”

“Listen, I am used to some of your tactics and I know that you have the ambition to solve every case. But to give me a complete list of tasks here is really going too far!” He took a stunned look at the sheet of paper Jupiter had placed on his desk. “Looking for an Indian jewel thief from the seventies? Checking on a policeman? Check the cause of death of Harry Shreber? Find out where a man with the common name of John Fisher is buried? Check on the mayor of Waterside’s past? Tell me, do you want me to lose my job?”

“Not at all, sir,” said Jupiter. “I want you to help us solve this case. Surely this could be a career move for you.”

“Yes, a jump straight back to traffic patrol! No, Jupiter, that’s not possible. What have you got yourselves into again?”

“If you won’t help us, there’s no point in explaining.”

The eyes of the inspector became narrow. “Jupiter Jones, I’ve put up a lot with you, but you should think twice before you really want to annoy me further.”

“No, sir. Sorry. Couldn’t you at least clarify one of our questions?”

“Which one?”

“How did Harry Shreber die.”

“Fine,” growled Cotta. “I can actually answer that. He had a heart attack. My colleagues from Waterside suspect that he was terribly frightened about something or someone. They found footprints outside his living room window. Someone had been standing there for quite a while, looking in. But of course, due to the removal of the plane, everything there is now rolled over and there are no more traces.”

“Was his secretary Mr Mason questioned?”

“Yes, of course. But he wasn’t in the house that night, and he didn’t notice anything suspicious before that.”

“Did he tell the police about the strange envelopes with the photographs that Mr Shreber had received?”

“Yes. But why do you ask me that? All this is Inspector Havilland’s case, not mine.”

“We know that,” Jupiter said. “Please, can you check on Sergeant Madhu for us?”

“Give me one reason why I should do that, Jupiter. Something like this can get me into a whole lot of trouble.”

“I think he has something to hide.”

“That’s not enough for a reason. Is that all you’ve got?”

“Don’t you find it strange that after Mr Sapchevsky made a call to the Waterside Police Department, no police patrol went to his house, but a couple of criminals in a stolen police car? That is indeed strange.”

The inspector thought for a while and finally nodded. “All right, I’ll ask around. But that’s all I can do for you, okay? I can’t do anything more without evidence, and you’ll have to give it to me.”

“Good,” Jupiter said resolutely and stood up. “We will do that. And could you perhaps find a white yacht named *Ruby* for us?”

“No.”

“Thank you, sir!”

Cotta looked at him sincerely. “If you’re thanking me, I know I’ll regret it.”

Outside the Rocky Beach Police Department, they first treated themselves to ice cream. They sat down on a low wall in the car park, let their legs dangle and looked out over the lower lying rows of houses to the peaceful blue sea. Their thoughts, however, were less peaceful. It wasn’t the first time that an initially puzzling case suddenly made them look into eerie abysses.

“Poor Mr Shreber,” Bob said gloomily. “First he is drawn into a terrible story against his will. Then he tries to protect his friend and he has nothing but misfortune all his life. In the end, he wants to make up for his mistake—and then someone scares him so much that he drops dead.”

“Are you thinking what I am thinking?” Pete asked. “That such a demon mask would be a great way to scare someone to death who is already scared anyway?”

Jupiter and Bob nodded.

“Rashura was closer to him than he knew,” Jupiter said. “Do you still think it was Nat?”

Pete hesitated. “No. I’m angry with Nat and would like to punch him because he had let us down... but I actually don’t trust him to be so mean. Shreber was his friend after all!”

“But what about Sergeant Madhu,” Bob asked, trying to lick a trickle of chocolate ice cream off his chin before it dripped onto his shirt. “Could it have been him?”

“I don’t think so,” said Pete. “Why should he have helped us when he himself is Rashura?”

“To save his accomplices,” Bob suggested. “He also thought that Ishmael, I mean Nat, had lured them to the *Leviathan*.”

“Rashura is cunning and continues to remain in the background. No one knows what he looks like, not even his own people,” Jupiter said. “It is even possible that he got Smith or Taylor to put on the mask to frighten Mr Shreber. If we want to catch Rashura, we have to be smarter than he is.”

“I don’t feel very smart right now,” grumbled Pete. “I feel like a puppet who’s had its strings cut. I have no idea what we should do...”

“First we have to find Smith, Taylor and Angelica,” said Jupiter. “They have taken the Star of Kerala and the other jewels from us. Let’s assume they will hand them over to Rashura... and let’s hope they haven’t done so yet.”

“If Inspector Cotta can’t find the *Ruby*, maybe Nat can,” said Bob. “If we can agree that he, at least, is on our side...”

Jupiter looked out to the sea. “The only question is—where is he? It’s been two days since he went after the *Ruby*. Maybe... something happened to him...”

13. Family Stories

It was night-time in Waterside. The streets of the town lay silent under the dark sky, with individual stars sparkling through a haze. After the sweltering heat of the day, the air was pleasantly cool and smelled of roses and hibiscus.

A silver sports car stood in the garage entrance of a large white house. It was an expensive and distinguished colonial-style house with a column-supported balcony above the entrance door. In front of the lower windows, roses ran upwards between ornamental lattices.

What didn't quite fit in with the distinguished atmosphere were Jupiter, Pete and Bob, who were crouched among the bushes close to the house wall. They had actually wanted to follow the trail of the *Ruby* to find Nat, but Inspector Cotta had not contacted them yet. They also had not figured out how they could make an eight-hour drive to Tucson to check on John Fisher's plane. Eventually, they had decided to investigate the Fisher family.

They had heard loud voices from one of the windows as they got out of the car, and since one of the quarrelling people was clearly Curtis and the other should be his father, they had hidden in the bushes and listened. After only a few seconds, it was clear to them that they could not have chosen a better evening for spying.

“Fine,” said the mayor. The Three Investigators didn’t know what he looked like, but with his deep booming voice, he could probably easily make himself heard in administrative meetings. “Really great. Do you realize the position you are putting me in? How do you think it will look when that junk dealer reports you for trespassing after Havilland is already targeting you for theft? Do you ever think of me in all your silly little games?”

“No, why?” Curtis replied poisonously. “Since you are already thinking of nothing but yourself, why should I do that too? Besides, I could report that ridiculous Jones much earlier. That gorilla of his ruined my shoes with his stupid water spray!”

“Your shoes?” his father exploded. “Who cares about your shoes! What was that all about? What makes you behave like a cheapskate?”

“Sure, I’m a cheapskate,” Curtis gave back cheekily and the three boys outside the window suppressed a giggle. “That’s still better than being a politician and being scared of what people think. You may not care about our inheritance, but I do. I want what is ours!”

“By breaking into Shreber’s house and stealing a box?” the mayor shouted.

“So what?” Curtis argued. “That fat kid couldn’t identify me and Havilland had to let me go. Simply, he has no case against me as no one else saw me taking that box!”

“Then why did you go to the junkyard?”

“They had the key, Dad,” Curtis replied. “The fat kid found it in Shreber’s plane. The key is ours, if you must know.”

“What key are you talking about?” The major burst out.

“What key?” Curtis shouted back. “The key to Uncle John’s treasure, Dad!”

“We are not entitled to anything, you fool! My brother was a gambler and a drunkard, and when he died, he didn’t even own the house he lived in! We gave up our inheritance then —that would have been a debt of thirty thousand dollars!”

“Oh that’s it, is it?” Curtis continued. “You didn’t want to be associated with him because of his reputation, is it? Is that all because of your position here in Waterside? Mum

told me that you didn't even want anything to do with his funeral. Eventually, Shreber and the other guy handled everything."

"Yes, you're right," the mayor admitted. "I was deputy mayor then, working my way up to be mayor. Do you understand how difficult it would be for me if the people knew that I had that kind of a brother?"

"I don't care," Curtis said. "His letter said there was a treasure, so I had to get the key, even though I do not know where the treasure is at the moment."

"Okay wise guy, if the key leads to a treasure, how come it was in Shreber's plane?"

"That's all your fault!" Curtis shouted. "You never wanted anything to do with your brother, so he probably gave the key to Shreber! And before Shreber died, he hid the key in his old junk plane!"

"Look, Curtis!" his father said. "There is no treasure... and do you know why? If my brother had some sort of treasure, why was he always broke? If he were so rich, why did he need to be a compulsive gambler? After he returned from India, did you know how many times he had contacted me to ask for money?"

"I still believe that he had a treasure hidden somewhere. It is now ours and I want it. Come on, Dad, I'll give you something too, so you can bribe your voters with it!"

"I'm warning you, Curtis," his father said. "Don't do anything foolish to jeopardize my position. Stop whatever nonsense you are involved in, or else you move out and don't come back! ... Now, get out of here!" the major yelled.

For a moment, there was silence. "Fine," Curtis said scornfully and moved away from the window. "If that's the way you want it, so be it!" A door slammed shut.

"Come along," Jupiter whispered and The Three Investigators left their listening post and crept along the wall of the house. Then they scurried to the trees and from there onto the street.

"Curtis must have been following us from the beginning," Jupiter said, "maybe since the day he stole the box with the model planes from Mr Shreber's house. He was probably the man who supposedly had an interest in buying the plane but wanted to check it out first. Do you remember? My uncle said the man was blond and had a scar. Curtis is blond and has a big scar on his arm!"

"Then why didn't Uncle Titus recognize him when he came to the salvage yard to get the key?"

"Uncle Titus said that he did not get a good look at his face because he was wearing dark glasses and had a cap on," Jupe surmised.

"Now what?" Pete asked.

The sound of a slamming car door interrupted Jupiter's answer.

"Curtis!" Pete hissed and they ducked behind the fence immediately.

Curtis drove out of the driveway, turned and accelerated. The Three Investigators jumped up and ran off. In no time at all, they were sitting in Bob's Beetle, rattling after Curtis in his silver sports car.

The cheapskate did not notice that someone was following him. Quickly, but not recklessly, he steered his car through the streets of Waterside and finally stopped in another neighbourhood in front of a house that looked familiar to Jupiter and Pete.

"I can't believe this!" Pete exclaimed.

At a safe distance, Bob stopped the Beetle. Silently they watched Curtis get out, walked to the front door and rang the bell. After a short time, a man opened the door. It was Sergeant Madhu!

Curtis exchanged a few words with him and Madhu let him in.

“Quick!” said Jupiter. They got out, ran to the house and ducked under the living room window—a tactic that had proven its worth. As a precaution, Jupiter took his mobile phone out of his pocket and switched it off and then they listened.

“Nonsense! Nobody saw me,” Curtis just said.

“It doesn’t matter.” Madhu’s voice was cold and The Three Investigators involuntarily shivered. “I told you not to come here!”

“And why should I follow everything you say?” Curtis sneered. “Anyway, I’m here to get my money. You told me there’s money in this thing and I want it!”

“What have you achieved?” Madhu said. “Nothing, as far as I am concerned.”

“I can’t continue on,” Curtis said. “My father is giving me trouble and I can’t afford that! Give me what we agreed or I’ll tell Havilland and then you’re a dead man.”

For a few moments, there was silence. Jupiter, Pete and Bob held their breath.

“And what would you tell him?” Now the voice was dark and soft like the hissing of a snake before it struck... but Curtis did not sense the warning.

“... That you’re just a rotten cop doing dubious things. I know that you are in cahoots with the criminals!”

“You’ll have a hard time finding evidence for that.”

“Not at all. After all, I am the mayor’s son and you are just a small-town cop. I saw you talking to those guys before they went to Sapchevsky’s house! So if I choose to tell, you’re done... and if they are convicted of burning down the house, you’ll find yourself in bigger trouble. Give me my money now!”

Suddenly, Pete noticed the First Investigator moving and he sensed something. “Jupe, don’t!” he whispered and grabbed Jupiter’s arm, but he was too slow.

Jupiter got up and stood in front of the window peering into the living room.

“Hello, Sergeant Madhu,” he said cheerfully. “Do you need help?”

14. The Three Blackmailers

Madhu and Curtis turned around, startled. Apart from them, there was someone else in the large room—an old Indian woman in an armchair, wearing a colourful traditional dress and loads of bracelets and necklaces.

All three stared at Jupiter with such astonishment as if they had seen a ghost in front of them—in fact, three ghosts when Bob and Pete also emerged into the scene and greeted them politely.

Madhu was the first to recover. “I guess I should have called you every now and then.”

“I have switched off my mobile phone,” Jupiter said and beamed at him. “Hello, Curtis! Are we interrupting anything?”

“Yes, you rascals!” Curtis had turned dark red and was struggling to control himself. “What are you doing here?”

“Routine investigation... May we come in, sir?” Jupe said and turned to the woman in the armchair. “Ma’am?”

“My mother doesn’t speak English,” said Madhu, who had regained his composure. “Yes, come in from the front door.”

The Three Investigators went to the front door and Madhu opened it for them to enter. Pete and Bob racked their brains in vain over what Jupiter was up to, but he didn’t leave them in the dark for long.

“Curtis, the game is over,” Jupe said as soon as he entered the living room. “Theft, trespassing and blackmail... I think this time Inspector Havilland actually has something on you.”

“What are you babbling about?” Curtis bared his teeth like a cornered animal. “You can’t prove any of this!”

“Yes, we can. We followed you after we overheard your conversation with your father. And we were listening very carefully even now. I suggest you go home, and forget about the whole thing—like your father told you.”

That’s when Curtis lost his nerve. “Damn it!” he yelled. “It’s my treasure! John Fisher was my uncle and we’re entitled to our inheritance! My family! Not some runaway small-town cop or three Rocky Beach wannabe investigators!”

“Could be,” said Jupiter, “but as stupid, clumsy, and negligent as you’ve been so far, you’re ruining every chance you have for yourself. Believe me, we have no interest in the treasure! We are investigators and only want to solve this case! We don’t care who the treasure belongs to in the end. We just want to find it.”

Curtis stared at him. Madhu also seemed surprised and Pete and Bob could not believe their ears.

“Jupe!” said Bob. “What are you saying?”

“Very simple,” Jupiter said and looked firmly at Curtis. “We don’t need another enemy. I will make you a proposal, Curtis—go home and let us do our work. If your family has a right to the treasure, then you will get it. I’m sure your father would also prefer it if this could be done without any crooked means.”

“Ha!” Curtis came out angrily and pointed at Madhu. “He’s the only one who’s doing anything crooked here! He involved in the fire at Sapchevsky’s house.”

Madhu opened his mouth, but Curtis wouldn’t let him speak. “Denial is useless, Madhu!”

“You can try telling that to the authorities,” Jupe continued. “Maybe you’ll get lucky and Sergeant Madhu won’t report you for attempted blackmail.”

“Why wouldn’t I do that,” the Indian policeman asked with a completely impenetrable expression.

“Because then, some things would come to light that you would rather keep secret,” Jupe said.

“Oh, I see...” Madhu looked at Jupiter with a faint smile on his lips. “Are you also trying blackmail now?”

“Yes,” Jupiter admitted. “But that, I believe, is in your best interests.”

The old woman moved and said a few words in her language. Already at the first word, The Three Investigators knew that they had heard this voice before. It was a hoarse, soundless croak that hurt their ears.

Madhu nodded at the woman and then turned to Curtis. “I’ll forget that you were here tonight. Leave and never come back.”

Curtis stared at him hatefully, clenched his fists, seemed to want to say something, and gave off an angry gasp. “Oh, good riddance to you all!”

He stormed out of the living room into the hall and the front door slammed shut behind him. Immediately afterwards they heard the engine of the sports car howling and the car racing off into the night.

Sergeant Madhu looked out the window and said thoughtfully: “I think he’s going to get a speeding ticket.” Then he turned to The Three Investigators. “I haven’t introduced you yet —how very rude of me.”

He said a few words to his mother and gave the names of the three boys. The old woman looked at The Three Investigators in silence, then put her hands together in front of her chest and bowed briefly. Surprised and clumsily, they returned the bow, which seemed to amuse the woman.

“Sit down,” said Sergeant Madhu to his blackmailers. “How about a cup of tea?”

15. Interrogating a Police Officer

“Will you poison us?” Pete enquired hostilely.

“Why would I do that?” the policeman replied.

“I don’t know. I don’t understand anything here anymore, and it seems that everyone here wants to poison, blackmail or otherwise hurt anyone that comes along. Maybe someone will finally explain to me what is going on here!”

“Me too, please,” Bob said. “Jupe, how about giving us an insight into this?”

“The matter is quite clear, fellas. Sergeant Madhu has strayed a little from official channels in order to solve this case. And he contacted Rashura’s accomplices and even helped them, didn’t you, Sergeant? Didn’t you see to it that Smith and Taylor took the police car and posed as fake policemen?”

“And why would I do that?” the policeman asked.

“There are three possible answers to this question—either you are a criminal and are in cahoots with Rashura... or you are playing a game trying to get the treasure from Rashura... or you are an honest policeman who has been cleared by his superior to put Rashura behind bars. I would prefer the last option, but I am not entirely convinced.”

“And why not?”

“Because you didn’t tell Inspector Havilland the truth.”

“You can’t know that, unless you planted one of your bugs on me.”

“Unfortunately we did not,” Jupiter said regretfully. “But how would it be if you told us the truth for a change?”

“About what?”

“About you... for instance, do you really work for the Indian government?”

“Yes.”

“And did you come to America to search for the treasure?”

Madhu smiled. “No.”

“Going after John Fisher?”

“No.”

“Finding Rashura?”

“That’s right... Are you sure you don’t want some tea?”

“Quite sure, thank you,” Jupiter said. “So, Sergeant Madhu... you didn’t tell us everything, right?”

“Like what?”

“How was Anuradha involved with Rashura?”

“The authorities have reasons to believe that they were both involved in the theft of the maharaja’s treasure.”

“Is that true?”

“I don’t know.”

“What do you know about Rashura?”

“He goes by that alias and at that time, nobody, including the authorities, knew his true identity. It was further suspected that he engaged John Fisher to smuggle the treasure out of India.”

“But you know Rashura is here—in the US,” Pete asked.

“Yes. We had some conversations with Harry Shreber before he died. He told us that he was haunted by a demon named Rashura.”

“How did you know you had to come to Waterside of all places?” Pete continued.

“Pete,” said Sergeant Madhu, “the Indian police also have some intelligence and contacts. We were able to trace Fisher, Shreber and Maruthers and followed them here. Fisher and Maruthers had died then and Shreber refused to tell me anything more. I couldn’t get any further until he died and left his will. And I still don’t understand why he did that. He had dozens of chances to tell us the truth. To catch Rashura, we could even have given Shreber immunity from prosecution. I told him that but he wouldn’t go along with it.”

“So you’re going after Rashura,” Bob said, “and Nathan Holbrook is doing the same. But Rashura still slipped through your fingers! He now has the Star of Kerala and a handful of the jewels!”

“That won’t be enough for him, though,” said Madhu. “He would want all the jewels.”

“So I suppose the jewels are at that ‘resting place’ that Shreber said!” Pete remarked. “Do you have any idea where that is?”

“I don’t know yet,” Madhu replied.

“You had said that Anuradha was a government agent who worked at the palace. How did she go from being an agent to a fugitive?” Jupiter continued the interrogation.

“From the authorities point of view, Anuradha was deemed to be the insider at the palace. The fact that both she and the treasure had gone missing didn’t help her. The search for both suspects started a long time ago but had been put on hold when there was no progress. Only a few years ago, it was picked up again with new leads on Rashura.”

“Since Anuradha is missing, would it mean that if Rashura is found, he could clear up this mystery?” Jupe asked.

“That would be true—if he comes clean. That might even help us clarify Anuradha’s involvement back then.”

“Anyway, that would hardly mean much since she’s been missing for forty years,” Bob remarked.

Madhu remained silent, and Jupiter pinched his lower lip. After a short, pronounced silence, the First Investigator said: “What time is it anyway? I think we should go, fellas. Don’t worry, Sergeant, we’ll keep all this to ourselves for the time being… if you help us.”

“Of course,” Madhu said and stood up to escort The Three Investigators to the door. “Good night.”

“Good night, Sergeant—and good night, ma’am.”

The old woman nodded silently, and her sharp eyes fixed on Jupiter. He took note, nodded politely to her and left.

On the way back, Bob said: “We’ll have to tell Inspector Havilland what we found out, won’t we?”

“What do you want to tell him?” Jupiter asked. “We just promised Madhu not to say anything that could harm him. He might have his reasons for collaborating with the criminals and Curtis Fisher.”

“And what about the stolen police car?” Bob asked.

“He can deny it.”

“And the way he got Taylor to attend to Mr Sapchevsky’s call?”

“That can hurt him.”

“Since when do we show consideration for those who break the law?”

“We’ve done that before,” Jupe explained. “And that was when they either had not done any damage, or had made good the damage, or had helped arrest much worse criminals.”

“I still don’t like it,” Bob said.

Jupiter did not answer.

Silently they drove through the mountains back to Rocky Beach. Just before they reached the salvage yard, Jupiter said: “Tomorrow we should talk to Mr Mason. I’m sure he’d like to hear what progress we have made.”

“He’ll be rather angry,” Pete said tiredly. “What have we got to show for it? Nothing—except for a whole lot of confusing information. I still can’t tell who is telling the truth. We also do not have the Star of Kerala.”

“If we explain to him who told us what, when and why, it will be far too complicated,” said Jupiter. “We’ll just tell him what happened at the *Leviathan*. Come back to Headquarters for a moment so we can discuss what we’re going to tell him.”

“Must we?” murmured Bob. “I’m dog-tired!”

“It won’t take long. I have something to explain to you anyway. It’s time we set a trap for Rashura.”

When they met with Mr Mason on Saturday morning at the same ice cream parlour opposite the Waterside Courthouse and briefed him on what had happened, he listened attentively and was not angry, but horrified.

“Goodness! This has become really dangerous! I would never have dreamed of that—and I’m sure Mr Shreber didn’t either. No. Should you be stopping this investigation now?”

They shook their heads unanimously.

“But you did not get the stone. The criminals have it!”

“But we have the key to the ‘resting place’,” Bob said.

Irritated, Mr Mason frowned. “The ‘resting place’? That was mentioned in Mr Shreber’s letter, wasn’t it? But what’s that?”

“That’s where the rest of the treasure is,” Bob replied.

“Oh!” The secretary looked from one investigator to another. “You know where the treasure is?”

Pete nodded. “And the criminals probably know it too. We fear that they have caught Nat and he will probably tell them what he knows. But we will set a trap for them.”

Mr Mason raised his hands in shock. “A trap? Boys, this is extremely dangerous! You’d better leave this to the police! You know these people will stop at nothing!”

“Don’t worry, Mr Mason!” Jupiter assured him. “The police will be well hidden and strike at the right moment. Then we’ll be rid of the criminals, get back the Star of Kerala and recover the rest of the treasure. After that, we can decide what is the right thing to do.”

Mr Mason made an unhappy face. “I don’t like it. This is too dangerous! What if Rashura suddenly shows up?”

“I don’t think he will show up there,” Jupiter said in a confident tone. “He has kept himself in the background all this time and will certainly not change that now. He’ll probably wait in hiding for Smith and his accomplices to bring him the treasure. And where this hiding place is, the police will get it out of them.”

“You’ve really thought of everything.” The old man nodded approvingly. “I think... yes, I think I’d like to be there. I feel like I owe it to Mr Shreber, after all this while...”

“Why not?” said the First Investigator. “We don’t mind, do we?”

Bob and Pete shook their heads.

“Done!” said Mr Mason. “I’m really not cut out for an adventure, but I wouldn’t miss this for the world. So where is this ‘resting place’?”

“We will know when we find John Fisher’s plane,” said Jupiter. “It’s somewhere in the grounds of the Pima Air & Space Museum in Tucson. All we have to do is to get there...”

“It’s no problem.” The confidence of The Three Investigators seemed to inspire Mr Mason. “We’ll just rent a small sports plane. I have a friend who’s an amateur pilot and I’m sure he’d love to fly us to Arizona!”

“That’s great!” Jupe said as Pete and Bob beamed.

“Good! When do you want to go?”

“As soon as possible, preferably tomorrow morning,” Jupiter said.

“I’ll have to call my friend and check his availability,” Mr Mason said. “Then I’ll tell you the time to meet.”

“Where shall we meet?” Bob asked.

“At a small gliding field just north from here,” Mr Mason said. “I’ll give you the directions now.” He drew a rough map on a piece of paper and handed it to Jupiter.

“Thank you,” Jupe said.

“Okay,” the secretary nodded and stood up. “Sit still and enjoy your ice cream. It’s on me again. It’s already a tradition, so to speak. I’ll get back to you soon!”

16. An Army of Blind Eagles

Sunday morning was hazy and cool—a welcome change from the Californian heat. The glider airfield was located a short distance north of Waterside. When Jupiter, Pete and Bob climbed out of the Beetle, they were not presented with the usual spectacular view of Santa Monica Bay with the skyline of Los Angeles in the distance, but a world that disappeared in a white haze beyond the lower-lying rows of houses. Nine gliders, two sports planes and a four-seater small Cessna stood in neat rows on the paved square lined with prickly bushes.

In a small building that reminded The Three Investigators of the salvage yard's office, they met Mr Mason and his friend, a very gaunt, taciturn man whom the secretary introduced as Jackson Stout. He nodded to them only briefly. His excitement about doing a favour for a friend was apparently very limited, but Mr Mason was in too good a mood to be irritated.

“Well, here we go! Jack, the haze is gonna clear up, right?”

“Sure,” said Mr Stout briefly. “Should be gone when we reach the desert.”

“Great. Here we go, huh?” Mr Mason said.

They left the building, went to the Cessna and got in. Mr Stout checked the seat belts and then he turned on the engine and let the plane roll. Through the windows, Jupiter, Pete and Bob watched as the runway whizzed beneath them and then sank down. They were in the air.

Apparently, the friendship of Mr Mason and Mr Stout was one of those that got along without many words. Mr Mason's initial enthusiasm seemed to have waned. He gazed silently out the window. Mr Stout flew the plane, listened to the radio and occasionally passed on information.

Jupiter took the opportunity to dig a map of Tucson out of his pocket and spread it across himself, Pete and Bob. “This is the city. To the east is the Pima Air & Space Museum. It houses nearly three hundred aeroplanes and helicopters, sorted by type, from small private aircraft to jumbo jets. From here, there are limited guided bus tours to the neighbouring ‘Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group’ or AMARG. This is a central storage facility for many decommissioned US military aircraft. This could be where we should go.”

“An aircraft museum,” Bob said half-loud, barely audible through the engine noise. “Do you think it's a coincidence that it's the very museum Nat works in?”

“Perhaps, perhaps not... but what is important is that Nat knew everything from the beginning,” Jupe said. “We just have to find out how much of what he told us was as bogus as Madhu's story.”

“Has anyone ever told us the truth in this case?” growled Pete.

“We will figure that out soon,” said Jupiter.

“I still don't know how you can figure anything out from this!” Pete exclaimed.

“First, by using my innate intelligence and ability to deduce,” Jupiter boasted. “And second, by investigating.”

Pete sighed. “Do you know those computer games where you follow a specific route and search for clues along the way? I would have liked to have something like that—not something where the suspects and the clues are scattered over California, Arizona, India, on a sunken ship and over forty years!”

“And where's the challenge in that?” Jupe asked.

Pete had to grin involuntarily. "Well, along the route, of course!" All three of them laughed.

Below them now lay the mountains of Hollywood. The air was still hazy, but the grey veil had lifted. Cloudless, the blue sky arched over them and the cabin of the Cessna heated up as it flew over hills, houses and streets... towards the desert.

Two hours later, it was unbearably hot in the plane. Outside, there was no haze and not a trace of green. In the light of the scorching sun, the red and brown rock formations beneath them looked like they had been cut out with a sharp knife. The Three Investigators had gratefully accepted the water bottles that Mr Stout had offered them, so they had left their own supplies untouched.

They flew over the outskirts of Tucson, and Stout followed the instructions on the radio and steered the Cessna in a wide arc to the east.

"There it is," Mr Mason suddenly said.

The Three Investigators stretched their necks and looked out the window. Beneath them lay an almost endless flat plain on which hundreds of aircraft stood. The air shimmered over the white, grey and spotted metal bodies, sunlight flashed through the windows like a short greeting as the Cessna tilted slightly to one side and Stout prepared for landing.

The Three Investigators only discovered the runway when they were already directly above it. They clawed at the seats involuntarily as they remembered well some previous unpleasant landings in a small plane, but Stout understood the aircraft well and set the Cessna down very easily. There was a short jolt when the tyres touched the ground, and then the plane rolled on and finally stopped.

Mr Stout opened the outer door and a gush of hot desert air hit the cabin. The Three Investigators immediately had their T-shirts stuck to their bodies. They got out and felt as if they were standing in an oven.

Mr Mason dabbed his forehead with a white handkerchief. "So here we are. How do we find the plane?"

"We're taking the bus." Jupiter pointed to a minibus that was coming towards them across the runway. "As I understand, we're not allowed to walk around here... more so, it would be too far and too hot to walk."

"It seems unsuitable to drive a tourist bus after a horde of criminals," Mr Mason said with concern.

"Why, sir?" Jupe said. "At least it has the advantage that they won't expect it—if they're still here at all."

They waved at Mr Stout, who seemed to have no interest in the search and preferred to have a cold beer in the museum hall at the edge of the tarmac. Then they boarded the fortunately air-conditioned bus and Mr Mason bought four tickets from the driver—the sight of which suddenly made the hearts of The Three Investigators beat faster. This was not only because she was young, pretty, blonde and had a nice smile on her face, but also because of her name tag which read 'Ruth Parker'! That's the woman who knew Nat was hiding behind the name 'Ishmael'.

"Welcome aboard!" she said cheerfully. "Would you like the grand tour across the area? Or are you interested in special aircraft types? We have everything here from microlight aircraft to the Airbus. I'll take you anywhere you want to go, and drinks are available in the minibar at the back of the bus. However, they cost extra. So what would you like?"

She looked at Mr Mason, but he raised his hands defensively. "Oh, I'm just tagging along. The boys decide where we go."

"We want to look at old military aircraft," said Jupiter, "especially those from the Navy. Isn't that what you have?"

"Oh, yes," Miss Parker said cheerfully. "Well, I'll bring you to the best ones—in the area we call the 'Boneyard'!"

She drove off. The path led past planes, planes, and more planes than The Three Investigators had seen in their entire lives—big aircraft, small aircraft, some like new, others covered in dust and rotting in the merciless desert heat of the day and the cold of the night. Almost all cockpits and other glass panels were covered with white paint to protect them from the sun. It looked like a whole army of blind eagles.

Every now and then, they met other minibuses with passengers who were pressing their noses against the windows and diligently taking photographs.

"May we also get out?" Pete asked Miss Parker.

She nodded. "Many aeroplanes are open for inspection, but only under supervision. School classes come here almost daily. It would be a disaster if something happened to a child through carelessness."

"What about the military planes?" Jupiter asked. "We are—uh—looking for a very specific aircraft."

"Which one?"

"We do not know for sure. It was decommissioned from the Navy. This is the number." He gave Miss Parker a note. It had the number of John Fisher's plane that Captain Murphy had given them.

Miss Parker looked at the note and nodded. "Yes, I know that plane. I'll bring you there now."

"Thank you." Jupiter put the note back in his pocket, turned around and looked back at the route they had come. Far behind them, the sun was glistening on the glass of a moving black-and-white car that was not a minibus. Jupiter turned around again.

The journey continued and finally they reached the area where Miss Parker had referred to as the 'Boneyard'. It was on the outskirts of the vast area. There were aeroplanes in various stages of decay. Some had their landing gear broken off, others were missing their wings. Here the cockpit windows were not painted but in some cases, they were splintered or broken off completely. Unwillingly, The Three Investigators thought of their plane in the salvage yard. This would be a great place to put it. Behind the rusted wrecks, they saw a high white mesh fence, and beyond that was nothing but desert, bordered by a mountain range.

Miss Parker stopped the bus and pointed to a plane that looked just like all the others. "That's the plane you're looking for over there."

"We are not alone," suddenly Mr Mason said, who had been silent all along.

They turned around and saw a second minibus, which was positioned a little hidden behind the plane, and no one seemed to be in it. Far and wide, there was no other travel group.

"Good," Jupiter said resolutely. "We can check the plane ourselves."

Miss Parker raised her eyebrows and sent Jupiter an inscrutable look... but then she nodded. "Oh, all right. You're not little children that need supervision. Anyway, it's too hot outside for me." Mr Mason, too, decided to remain in the minibus.

The Three Investigators got out and the hot air enveloped them like a suffocating pillow. It was hard to believe that anyone could really breathe in this heat. They tried and felt as if they were breathing fire.

“Whew!” Bob gasped. “And we’re supposed to climb into a metal oven?”

“We will have no choice if we want to solve the case,” Jupiter said and marched purposefully towards the ancient aircraft.

It was no surprise that the door on the side could be opened without resistance, albeit screeching and creaking. Nor were The Three Investigators surprised that in the hot, stuffy interior, the light of a flashlight came up and blinded them.

“There you are,” said Smith. “Come right in. And no tricks!”

They were amazed and horrified and did not even try to argue with him, because they were quite sure that a gun was also aimed at them behind the beam of light. So they climbed into the aircraft and were immediately met by Taylor and another man, whom Bob recognized as the ‘bodyguard’ from the Orient Import warehouse.

But there was no trace of Nat.

“You three are surprisingly tough,” Smith remarked. “I did not expect you to come out of the *Leviathan* alive. How did you manage that?”

“We just used simple tools at our disposal,” replied Jupiter. “And you? How did you manage to escape from the Navy?”

“Oh, through good connections. A friend paid the bail and since we were only accused of a little gross mischief, we were released so quickly that we could even thank Mr Holbrook for that interesting experience.”

“Where is Nat? What have you done with him?”

“Yeah, what do you think? We don’t appreciate being ripped off at all. After we brought him to Fisher’s grave, he said he didn’t have the key to open the door... so we left him there.”

“So the ‘resting place’ is... Fisher’s grave?” Bob asked hoarsely.

“Yes, in fact, it’s a mausoleum. Mr Holbrook is now talking to the skeletons there.”

“Is he... is he dead?” Pete asked in a trembling voice. “Did you kill him?”

“What do you think? We are not murderers! And after all, he tipped us off that we should come here and search for the key. So we just locked him up. If he doesn’t manage to free himself before the air runs out, that’s his problem.”

“You’d better hope he succeeds,” Jupiter said angrily, “otherwise you will have a massive problem. You don’t stand a chance, Smith! Give up!”

Smith laughed. “I don’t even think about it. By the way, we have searched all over this wreck and there is no key here. So I ask you, where is the key. If you don’t tell me, you are the ones with a massive problem.”

“I don’t think so,” said Jupiter, “because you have missed something—this plane has no emergency exit.”

“What are you babbling about?” growled Smith.

“I am not babbling at all. Take a good look outside.”

“Taylor!” Smith cried.

Taylor went to the cockpit and peered out. “What? Darn!” Full of satisfaction, The Three Investigators heard the sudden panic in his voice. “Smith! There are police cars everywhere!”

“What?” yelled Smith. “You snitched on us, you bloody snot-noses? I’ll kill you for this!”

Jupiter, Pete and Bob started and despite the oppressive heat they were suddenly cold.

“No!” Jupe yelled.

“No!” Taylor yelled too. “Are you crazy? If you shoot, we won’t get out of this thing alive!”

"We can negotiate," said the 'bodyguard', and now Bob recognized his voice as that of Angelica's accomplice on the yacht. "We have the boys. We'll take them hostage and leave."

"And then spend a lifetime on the run?" Smith uttered a hollow laugh. "No. You win, you little rats. Just get out of here!"

"I would like the Star of Kerala and the rest of the jewels back," said Jupiter, hoping that his voice sounded firm. "Please give them to me."

For a few anxious seconds, everything remained silent. Then Smith reached into his pocket and took out a small pouch—the same one from the safe on the *Leviathan*. He tossed the pouch to Jupiter, who caught it and quickly opened it to take a quick look at the contents. "Thank you very much," he said.

"Don't thank me," Smith hissed hatefully. "Instead, you'd better pray we'll never meet again."

"Don't worry," Bob said snappily. "It'll be a long time."

A penetrating electronic whistling as if from a feedback made them all wince. "Attention!" a voice roared outside through a megaphone. "This is the police! Let the three boys go! Put down your weapons and come out slowly with your hands up!"

"You go first," Smith said to the 'bodyguard'.

The 'bodyguard' opened the door and shouted: "We surrender! Don't shoot!"

"Release the boys first," it roared from the megaphone.

"Yeah!" He signalled to the three boys to go out.

The Three Investigators climbed out of the plane and blinked at the bright sunlight.

Inspector Cotta had done a good job. At least eight police cars surrounded the plane and everywhere were police officers with their guns drawn. Behind them, minibuses and onlookers gathered.

One of the policemen waved The Three Investigators over. "Over here!"

They obeyed, and when they were safe, Smith, Taylor and the 'bodyguard' climbed out and were arrested immediately.

"For goodness' sake!" Mr Mason, followed by Miss Parker, rushed to the three boys.

"Are you all right?"

"We're fine," Bob said and the others nodded. "But Nat is not. Those criminals have locked him in some mausoleum, and if we don't find him, he'll suffocate!"

"A mausoleum?" repeated Mr Mason, stunned. "And where is it?"

Jupiter immediately turned to Ruth and said: "Miss Parker, where in Tucson is a cemetery with mausoleums?"

"That should be the South Cemetery," she replied.

"We have to go there immediately," Jupiter said. "Nat is there, at the 'resting place' of John Fisher!"

The policeman who had been listening to them interfered. "What are you talking about? What mausoleum? Who is Nat?"

"Our dog," Jupiter said before any of the others could open their mouths. "We have to go and rescue him immediately—or do you still need us, sir?"

"We need your testimony. Get your dog and then come straight to the police headquarters. Here is the address."

"Thank you."

"What are we waiting for?" Miss Parker didn't look happy now, but angry and worried. "Let's go to the South Cemetery—quick! We're taking the minibus."

"Come, fellas, there is no time to lose!" Jupiter urged.

17. The ‘Resting Place’

Miss Parker drove the minibus just as fast and purposefully through the traffic jams of Tucson as she did over the huge, dusty aircraft graveyard. More than once, The Three Investigators and Mr Mason clawed themselves into their seats to avoid being thrown against the side walls. A concert of angry shouts, sirens and honking followed them around the city.

Jupiter had looked at the Tucson map and had pointed to her the way to the South Cemetery, but she had replied: “I live in Tucson and I know secret shortcuts that your map won’t show. Just leave it to me!”

So the First Investigator put the map away and concentrated on surviving the journey and not getting carsick.

In an alarmingly short time, they had crossed half of Tucson and Miss Parker stopped the minibus with squealing tyres in front of a stone archway behind which the cemetery was located.

Immediately she jumped out and started running. “Uncle Nat!” she shouted so loudly that it echoed between the crosses and gravestones. “Uncle Nat! Where are you?”

“Miss Parker!” Jupiter cried and ran after her. Racing was not his favourite hobby anyway, and the scorching heat didn’t make it any better. “Wait! He might not be alone! Angelica could be there with him—”

She stopped and turned to him. “Excuse me? Who? Does it matter while he chokes to death?”

“Angelica is the gang member who administers poison,” Jupiter gasped.

Her eyes widened in horror. “Then maybe I shouldn’t yell like that, right? So she won’t be alerted?”

“Right.”

“Okay,” Miss Parker said. “Come on, the bigger mausoleums are back there.”

The Three Investigators and Mr Mason followed her to an older part of the cemetery, which looked as bare as the new one due to the lack of trees and ornamental plants. Here were not only simple crosses and gravestones, but magnificent marble mausoleums with tombs of family members side by side.

Suddenly, about fifty metres ahead of them, they noticed a hasty movement between the white stones. It was Angelica!

They continued to run forward, but when they reached the spot, there was no one there. Then they saw it—a small, temple-like mausoleum where above the door was a cast-iron plate with the words ‘Fisher Family’. Cotta had earlier informed The Three Investigators that John Fisher’s family originally came from this area so there was no surprise that he was buried here in his family’s plot.

They could see that the door lock was smashed, but someone had placed a heavy stone slab in front of the door so that it could not be opened from the inside.

Now Miss Parker no longer cared whether Angelica could hear her or not. She rushed forward and banged against the door. “Uncle Nat! Uncle Nat! Are you in there?”

For a few moments, there was silence while they listened anxiously. Then they heard a scraping noise and a hoarse voice inside. “Ruth?”

“Nat!” cried Jupiter. “It’s us, The Three Investigators! We’ll get you out of this!”

Again it was silent for a few anxious seconds. “Hurry up,” then came the weak reply. “No air—”

They just need to push the stone slab away from the door, but even with five of them, they hardly managed to move it. Centimetre by centimetre, it crunched over the gravel and finally the door was clear. Miss Parker jumped up, tore open the door and rushed in.

Nat was on the ground. He looked terrible. His clothes were dirty and torn, his face hollow-cheeked, his hands dirty and bruised from the futile attempts to open the door. He hardly reacted when Miss Parker knelt down next to him and hugged him.

“Water,” Bob said. “He needs water!”

“Here...” Pete unhooked his water bottle from his belt and handed it to Bob.

“Not water!” Jupiter said. “First he needs air!”

With united forces, they pulled him up and supported him on his way out. There they set him down on the stone slab.

It took him a while to recover enough to take a drink from the water bottle held to his mouth by Miss Parker. Only after that did he seem to notice who his rescuers were. “Thank you,” he croaked hoarsely. “They caught me when I—”

“You can tell us later,” said Jupiter. “First of all, you have to recover. We will take care of the ‘resting place’.”

Nat nodded laboriously and ran his tongue over his chapped lips. “Fisher’s tomb... but you need... the key.”

“We have it,” said Pete. “Don’t worry about it.”

Nat tried to stand up, but was too weak. Now Mr Mason stepped forward. “We know what we’re doing, Mr Holbrook. Come on, boys, let’s take a closer look at this tomb.”

“Not so fast, Rashura,” Jupiter said in a silky voice.

Mr Mason turned around on his heel and stared at Jupiter in disbelief. “Huh? Rashura?” Then he looked around hastily. “For goodness’ sake! Is he here?”

“Stop the acting!” cried Pete angrily. “We know you are Rashura! You’re a miserable, rotten wretch, Mr Mason!”

Miss Parker stared at The Three Investigators and Mr Mason in amazement. Even Nat shook his head. “It can’t be,” he croaked. “Mr Mason can’t be Rashura!”

“Unfortunately, he is,” said Jupiter. “This is the man who stole almost the entire treasure of a maharaja about forty years ago in India. He hid the treasure in an abandoned temple and paid John Fisher to smuggle it out of India to the US. Fisher did so, but he died before he could hand it back to Rashura.

“Shreber and Maruthers then found the treasure and hid it here—at the ‘resting place’ of John Fisher. For Rashura, the only connection to the treasure was Shreber and Maruthers. Later, Maruthers died.”

Nat coughed, took a sip of water and looked a little more alive. His voice didn’t sound quite so hoarse either. “But Mr Mason was Harry Shreber’s secretary!”

“How convenient,” Jupiter remarked. “Rashura masqueraded as Mr Mason and got himself a job being the secretary to Shreber. While handling affairs for Shreber, Mr Mason has tried to find out as much as possible about the treasure, but failed.”

“You’re out of your mind,” said Mr Mason angrily. “You’ve done such a good job—why are you starting to talk nonsense now, Jupiter Jones?”

“It’s not nonsense,” Bob said firmly and took over. “We learned that before he died, Fisher believed that the treasure carried a curse that sent a demon after him. With the unfortunate deaths of Fisher, Shreber’s wife and daughter, and Maruthers, Shreber too,

believed in the curse. Rashura knew it, and capitalized on it by scaring Shreber so that he would reveal the treasure in order to rid himself of the curse. What he did was to terrorize Shreber by sending him photos showing Anuradha. Then he or someone he engaged crept around the house with a demon mask. Mr Shreber got so frightened until he eventually died of a heart attack."

Then Jupiter continued: "As the secretary to Shreber, he knew about the will, and the clues given to us. That was when he got Smith and his gang to follow us to get to the treasure before we did."

Nat and Miss Parker stared at The Three Investigators. Then they turned and looked at Mr Mason.

"That's absolute rubbish," said Mr Mason angrily.

"What about the poisoning?" croaked Nat. "Smith and his men wouldn't poison their own boss!"

"It is possible because they themselves do not know who Rashura is. They never saw him and only received their instructions by telephone," Jupiter explained. "They just thought Mr Mason was an annoying old man who had learned too much about Rashura at Shreber's house. As ruthless as the gang is, they have no qualms of getting rid of obstacles along their way."

"But they did meet him! Mr Mason caught two of them breaking into Shreber's house and they—" A coughing attack interrupted Nat and it took a few seconds before he could continue speaking. "—And they beat him up so badly that he had to go to hospital. Rashura wouldn't have let his own people do that to him!"

"I thought about that for a while too," said Jupiter. "But how did we know about the two burglars? From the fact that Mr Mason called us instead of the police. In fact, he even told us not to call the police. Why not? Because the police might have discovered that the attack was a hoax.

"What he did was to make a bit of a fuss and knocked over the shelves to remove any possible suspicion against him. In fact, he wasn't that badly hurt. I asked Inspector Havilland to check with the hospital. Mr Mason only had a few superficial scratches, nothing more. Ironically, he was only really sick when his own people poisoned him.

"And then, there's the slip of the tongue, Mr Mason, do you remember?" Jupe continued. "When you visited us at the salvage yard after discharging from the hospital, you asked us whether we have found out anything about the Burning Crystal. All the while, you claimed not to know anything about the case including what we were supposed to look for. At that point in time, we never mentioned anything about a crystal or a treasure to you. How come all of a sudden you were aware of a crystal?"

"That's absurd," said Mr Mason angrily. "Absolute nonsense! You can't prove any of this."

"No, you're wrong," Bob said. "The two inspectors, Cotta and Havilland, have been working overtime since yesterday to answer all our questions. We finally managed to piece the puzzle together."

"And if Smith and his cronies finally talk, even if they have never seen you before, we may even get more evidences linking them to you," Jupiter concluded.

"Give it up," Pete said in disgust. "Honestly—we are absolutely sick and tired of being lied to."

And so the mask fell. The nice elderly gentleman who had treated them to ice cream was no longer nice. In his face was more malice and anger than any carved wooden mask of a demon. The Three Investigators involuntarily shrank back.

“You think you’re very smart, don’t you?” hissed Rashura. “You think you’ve got it all figured out now, the treasure is found and the bad guy takes it sportingly and goes to prison, don’t you? But I don’t take it sportingly. I’ve been waiting for this for forty years, and I’m not going to let three snotty kids spoil it!”

He moved his hand and suddenly there was a gun in it. “Jupiter! You’re going in there with me to get the treasure now, is that clear? For the rest of you, if you move or try something, I’ll pull the trigger.”

Nat fought himself to his feet, but a movement of Rashura’s gun made him freeze.

“I said don’t move!” Rashura said.

“And that goes for you too, Rashura,” said a voice behind them. “Drop your gun!”

Rashura suddenly swerved around and startled when he saw Sergeant Madhu!

The whole world seemed to be frozen when the policeman cautiously stepped out from behind one of the mausoleums with both hands holding a gun aiming at the criminal.

With Rashura stunned at that very moment, out of nowhere, Nat lashed out and gave him such a chop to the back of his neck and immediately grabbed the criminal’s arm so that he could not fire his gun.

The old man collapsed on his knees and then fell over on the ground unconscious. Then Nat kicked the gun away, slumped back down to the stone slab, gasping and clutching his hand.

“Very reprehensible, Ishmael,” said Sergeant Madhu as put his gun in his pocket and pulled out a pair of handcuffs. “Actually, I should arrest you for assault now—if I had seen anything, which I didn’t.”

Madhu turned around and raised his hand to give a signal. Four other police officers came up. The sergeant then knelt down next to the unconscious criminal, turned him on his side. “He probably won’t even remember the blow—but he will have plenty of time to think about what happened.”

With quick movements, Madhu handcuffed Mr Mason, straightened up and then turned to The Three Investigators, Nat and Miss Parker. “Are you all right?”

They nodded.

“Thank you, Sergeant!” said Jupiter. “I wasn’t sure whether we left you behind.”

“The young lady certainly tried,” Madhu said and a brief smile flashed up. “But if you can drive in India, you can drive anywhere in the US. Now let’s get the treasure. You have the key?”

“Yes,” Jupiter said.

The Three Investigators followed the sergeant into the mausoleum. Nat hesitated, but then he took a look at the unconscious Mr Mason and stayed outside. Miss Parker sat down next to her uncle and in a hoarse voice, he began to explain to her what was actually going on.

The ‘resting place’ had a normal gravestone with the inscription ‘John Benjamin Fisher’ and his date of birth and death. Behind the gravestone was a simple concrete cuboid structure. They walked around the structure and found, at the back, a solid metal door with a keyhole. There were nicks and deep scratches on the side of the door which seemed to indicate that the criminals had tried to break the door open but failed.

Jupiter fished the key out of his pocket and placed it in the keyhole. He turned the key effortlessly and the door opened.

They saw a small urn inside, but there was hardly any space left as six packed sacks almost completely filled the compartment. Sergeant Madhu opened one of the sacks and took out a handful of diamonds.

“Wow,” mumbled Pete.

“Yes,” said the Indian policeman, “this is the maharaja’s treasure.”

“Are you quite sure?” Jupiter asked and looked at him firmly.

Madhu nodded. “Absolutely. Barring any unforeseen circumstances, this treasure should go back to its rightful owners—the heirs of the maharaja.”

“Good,” Jupe said with satisfaction. “Now we can get Mr Mason to the police and tell the whole story.”

Sergeant Madhu went out and spoke to the other police officers who then went into the tomb to fetch the treasure out. Then the sergeant approached Nat and Miss Parker and had a few words with them. Miss Parker assured him that she would take care of Nat.

Finally, Sergeant Madhu went up to The Three Investigators. He was silent for a moment, looking at the three boys in turn. “I’m sorry I had misjudged you earlier. Jupiter, Pete and Bob, you have done very well.”

“We know,” Jupiter said, self-satisfied.

Madhu grinned and said: “By the way, just to let you know, we have also arrested Angelica a while ago when she was trying to escape from here... Now I’ll see to Mr Mason personally.” He raised his hand in greeting, turned and walked towards the criminal who was still on the ground.

“Just a moment!” Jupiter cried and ran up to the sergeant.

Sergeant Madhu turned around. “Yes?”

The First Investigator rummaged through his pocket, took out a small pouch and reached into it. When he pulled out his hand, on his palm lay the Burning Crystal—the Star of Kerala—shining in the sunlight like pure fire.

“You might want to show this to your mother,” Jupiter said. “I think she will be pleased.”

Sergeant Madhu took the stone and the pouch, but kept quiet. He looked at it for a while before his fingers closed so gently around the sapphire as if it was alive. Then he put the stone and the pouch into his pocket. Finally, he nodded very slowly and said: “Thank you.”

The sergeant turned around again and walked to Mr Mason, who had regained some consciousness, but was still lying on the gravel path. He stared up at Madhu with hatred and disgust.

“Come, Rashura!” said the policeman as he pulled the criminal up. “This hunt is over for you.” He took the old man by the arm and went away with him.

18. Back to Runaway Cats

“Juupeeterr!” cried Aunt Mathilda. “Jupe! Pete! Bob! Where are you?”

“Here, Aunt Mathilda!” Jupiter shouted back as The Three Investigators climbed out of the fuselage of the plane where they had been sitting inside playing cards. This was, so to speak, their farewell to the old plane. The next day, Nat and his niece would pick the plane up and take her to Tucson, where she would find her deserved final rest at the ‘Boneyard’.

It was now two days after the boys’ return from Tucson. After Sergeant Madhu and the Tucson police had left with the criminals and jewels, Ruth Parker and The Three Investigators had sent Nat to the hospital in the Pima minibus. There, he had received treatment and Ruth had stayed with him. Then the three boys had taken a taxi to the police headquarters as they had been told to do so after ‘rescuing their dog’. Madhu was there as well, and had accompanied The Three Investigators when they gave their statement for several hours.

After the police had interrogated Rashura and the gang members, many aspects of the case had been cleared up.

Regarding the fire that had burned down Mr Sapchevsky’s house, the gang’s ‘bodyguard’ had admitted to it as an accident but the gang had never planned the fire. The ‘bodyguard’ had attempted to break-open a safe with a portable welding torch. He had\accidentally set fire to the curtains and was unable to stop the spread. Anyway, he never did find the watch box. By the time Mr Sapchevsky had revealed Fisher’s Moby Dick numbers to Taylor, his house was already burning. In addition, the ‘bodyguard’ was the person who donned the demon mask to frighten Mr Shreber, and also the one who navigated the *Ruby*.

Smith and his cronies were associated with Orient Import. That had explained why they had gathered there and caught Bob spying on them. The Waterside police had called the owner in for questioning and time will tell whether he was involved in this matter.

Sergeant Madhu had also cleared up his position. He had been assigned by the Kerala Police in collaboration with the California State Police to bring Rashura to justice as well as to recover the treasure. This had explained why Inspector Havilland was not fully aware of the sergeant’s activities, such as resorting to somewhat ‘dubious’ tactics by collaborating with the gang members as well as Curtis Fisher. He had engaged Curtis to keep an eye on the gang and possibly lead him to Rashura. However, Curtis had failed miserably when he was more keen on securing the treasure for himself.

Sergeant Madhu would be working with his government to send the treasure back to India as well as to get Rashura extradited to Kerala to stand trial.

At Waterside, all was over for Curtis Fisher in his efforts to secure the treasure. As the jewels never belonged to his uncle, he would not get anything. Perhaps the only thing he could get for himself was a new pair of shoes—with his own money. His father, Charles Fisher, the mayor of Waterside, continued to dissociate himself from his brother’s affairs.

As for Gerry Dempster, he was glad that this episode was over and The Three Investigators had managed to ‘make up for the mistake’ and ‘do the right thing’ for his grandpa. As was expected, his father, Miles Dempster, couldn’t be bothered. In any case,

Gerry looked forward to visiting Pima and AMARG to see his grandpa's Skyraider in her final resting place.

Regarding the finder's fee for the treasure, if The Three Investigators were to receive anything, Bob had suggested that they should donate it all to Mr Sapchevsky to help him set up a new home. "I feel sorry for Mr Sapchevsky," Bob had said. "He had nothing to do with any of this, and now he has lost his house." Jupiter and Pete had agreed wholeheartedly.

And then there was Aunt Mathilda. With her hands on her hips, she looked at The Three Investigators. "I'll be glad when that ugly thing is finally gone. Come along!"

They already knew this tone. Resistance was futile. They trotted behind Aunt Mathilda to the fence where the boxes and cartons from Mr Shreber's house were piled up.

"Here," said Mrs Jones. "It's time to sort this out. It's best to start immediately."

"Why us?" Jupiter groaned. "Isn't that Jim's job? Where is he anyway? I haven't seen him today..."

"Jim has left," said Aunt Mathilda, irritated. "He said he was there to work, not to chase people off the premises with a water spray." She sighed. "Oh, I don't know. He was a great help to us, but if you want to work here you have to be a bit more flexible. Well, that can't be helped. Until your uncle finds a new helper, you'll just have to pitch in again... What are you smiling at?"

"Oh, nothing at all, dear aunt!" said Jupiter amusedly.

"I tell you what," Aunt Mathilda said. "For a change, why don't you come to the office right now and we'll have iced tea and cherry pie. Rest for a while and after that, you get to work."

"Agreed!" Jupe said. "Come on, fellas!"

"Just a minute!" Bob said. "Somebody's coming!"

They turned around. A pretty girl slightly younger than them strolled across the yard, looking at the pile of scrap metal, the countless boxes, the crammed shelves with junk and the aeroplane. Finally, she turned to them and smiled. "Hello! I'm Jennifer. I'm looking for The Three Investigators. Am I at the right place?"

"That's right," said Jupiter. "Hello, Jennifer. What can we do for you?"

Jennifer smiled at him full of hope. "It's about my cat, Minky," she explained. "She's been missing for three days and I just don't know how to get her back!"

"I see," Jupiter said with a smirk. "Then you've come to the right place. We have a person who specializes in runaway cats and will personally handle your case. Meet our colleague, Pete Crenshaw!"

"Jupe! Why me?" Pete exclaimed.

"What's wrong?" Jupiter asked sugar-sweetly. "You had resigned from dangerous cases, remember? You said you will only take on cases looking for runaway cats... and the like. So Bob and I have agreed to let you run our 'Missing Pets' department by yourself. We were going to tell you about this."

"What? Are you crazy?" Pete burst out. "You can't do this to me! Bob! Say something!"

Jupiter ignored Pete's rant and turned to Jennifer. "So, Jennifer... Pete will help you find Minky."

"But fellas, this is not funny! I didn't mean it seriously! I was just saying—"

But he did not get much further. Bob, who had watched Pete's stunned horror with an ever-widening grin, started to laugh. Jennifer also started laughing as Jupe and Bob made their way to the yard office.

And a bright light dawned on Pete...

